JOHN WOOD OMAN (1860-1939):

A CRITICAL STUDY OF HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THEOLOGY

by

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Title of Thesis John Wood Oman (1860-1939): A Critical Study of His Contribution to Theology

The contribution which John Oman has made to theology is evaluated in this thesis by an examination of his life and intellectual background, a survey of the general pattern of his major theological writings, an introduction to his methodology, and an exposition and critical evaluation of the major themes of his theology.

The writer attempts to show that the traditional elements in Oman's thinking came from his Calvinistic background, but that the creative stimulus for the distinctive elements in his theology were provided by Schleiermacher and Ritschl. From them Oman learned the significance of freedom in theology, and the major thesis of his thought may be characterized as a consistent presentation of the view that freedom in its fulness is possible only when it is firmly based upon a reality which faith apprehends and which sustains man's free action within the world. The primary task of his theology, therefore, is the attempt to relate freedom, interpreted in its profoundest personalistic sense, to the whole of theology in an adequate methodology and in the major themes of his thought—i.e., in the concepts of authority, religion, reconciliation and the Church.

Oman's methodology is that man is to survey his environment, both Natural and Supernatural, from the highest standpoint he can reach, with all his experience, insight, and knowledge, and that this must be attempted in an attitude of reverence and sincerity. He applied this method consistently and comprehensively to his theology and this is largely responsible for the integrity and wholeness of his thought which makes it a practical concern of life.

(over)

Oman has made a significant contribution to theology in certain areas such as the existential interpretation of religious authority, the reorientation of the doctrine of reconciliation according to its essential personalistic nature, and the insistence on the spiritual nature of the Church in its organization, method and task. However, there are some very serious limitations in his theology, such as the lack of an adequate treatment of the doctrines of sin and revelation; furthermore, his contribution to theology would have been much greater if the Christological and kerygmatic framework of the Christian faith had been given fuller expression and control in his thought. It is therefore concluded that Oman's greatest contribution to theology lies in his methodology where freedom, personality, sincerity, and comprehensiveness are essential concepts and attitudes for the study of theology.

PREFACE

There are many to whom I am indebted in the preparation of this study. Principal Charles S. Duthie and Professor John McIntyre of the University of Edinburgh have kindly offered suggestions, and it was through the graciousness and encouragement of Principal Duthie that the study was undertaken. Professor H. H. Farmer and Principal R. D. Whitehorn of Westminster College, Cambridge, were most generous with their time and assistance and I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to them and to the entire staff of Westminster College. Professor Farmer's lectures and writings have provided insights into Oman's thought which could not have been acquired elsewhere, and his warmth and generosity in private conversation were invaluable.

Miss Maisie Oman, Dr. Oman's daughter, graciously read the biographical portion and offered valuable suggestions and verifications. Conversations with her, with Rev. A. S. Cooper of St. Columba's Church in Cambridge, and with others in Cambridge who knew Oman in his lifetime, provided a knowledge of Oman's personality which added to the pleasure of the study. Because no biography has been published, it was felt that the chapter on his life should be included with this study of his theology.

Insofar as possible, the form of the thesis follows K. L. Turabian's A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations, published by the University of Chicago. Every effort has been made to rid the work of expressions peculiar to American speech. For the sake of uniformity, however, American spelling has been used throughout. Because of the frequency of references to Oman's books and several others, abbreviated titles have been used when these appear in footnotes after the initial reference.

I appreciate the patient efforts of the staffs of Westminster College Library and Cambridge University Library, the Library of New College, University of Edinburgh, and the National Library of Scotland.

Finally, I thank the Administration of Baylor University, Waco, Texas, U.S.A., for granting me a leave of absence from its Faculty and for providing financial aid in order that I might engage in this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I

THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF JOHN OMAN

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF JOHN OMAN

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF JOHN OMAN

In Stenness, Orkney, on July 23, 1860, there was born to Simon and Isabella Oman a son, John Wood, who would in future years be pointed out as among the most original minds that have contributed to theological studies in recent times.[1] John Oman was the second son in a family of four sons and two daughters born on the farm of Biggins, which had been owned by the Oman ancestry for hundreds of years.[2] Simon Oman, John's father, was a sailor and farmer, humble and uneducated; yet in the dedication of The Problem of Faith and Freedom in the Last Two Centuries John Oman described him as "a scholar only of life and action, but my best teacher."[3] Coming from one whose education reached great breadth, "these words are significant: probably they express appreciation of encouragement to do his own thinking, however much information he might imbibe from teachers."[4]

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[1]H. H. Farmer, "Memoir of the Author," in John Oman, Honest Religion (Cambridge: University Press, 1941), p. xxx.

[2]George Alexander, "Memoir of the Author," in John Oman, Honest Religion (Cambridge: University Press, 1941), p. xvi.

[3]John Oman, The Problem of Faith and Freedom in the Last Two Centuries (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), p. v.

[4]F. R. Tennant, "John Wood Oman, 1860-1939," Proceedings of the British Academy (1939), p. 333.

John Oman grew up a Northerner in character, and it was said of the mature man:

> In Dr. Oman's veins flows the blood of the Vikings and his home is in the sea-girt Orkneys, where nature yields a hard-won sustenance to a hardy toiling race. And it is the spirit of his sea-king ancestors that he has brought to the great adventure of life-dreams of great conquests, but also a resolute facing of all the dangers and difficulties of wind and wave, of current and shoal.[1]

Oman's mind was deeply shaped by the "freedom and simplicity of his boyhood—its close contacts with the soil and the sea and with the hardy and vigorous folk who gained their living from them."[2] They were, according to Oman, folk who, "whether for thought or action, divided humanity into men who went to sea and muffs who stayed at home, and for whom the Sovereignty of God meant the assurance of being able to face all storms, and seek no harbour of refuge."[3] Professor H.H. Farmer recognized the influence of Oman's Orcadian home, saying: "When I think of the great man, heather, and salt winds, and mountain mists come to mind rather than a gown and lecturer's desk; and his thought is the profounder for this."[4]

Dr. Oman once described how as a small boy, standing alone at the edge of the open sea, he had reflected upon the world around him:

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[1]"The New Principal, An Appreciation," The Monthly Messenger of the Presbyterian Church of England (No. 928, July, 1922), p. 154.

[2]H. H. Farmer, "Oman, John Wood," Dictionary of National Biography (1931-1940), p. 657.

[3]John Oman, Honest Religion (Cambridge: University Press, 1941), p. 165.

[4]Farmer, "Memoir," p. xxxi.

> To the very long sight of one who constantly looked from horizon to horizon, the depth of the sky was overwhelmingly impressive, and was the first object I think ever to hold my attention immovably. It compelled me to think of travelling on and on for ever and ever without being any nearer the end. Thus though space was, as it were, the illustration, the real impressiveness was in time: and perhaps time is always what gives the impressive quality. Through this first came the idea that I was alone. I had been to church. I think the preacher had been expressing the absolute difference between good and evil under the material forms of heaven and hell. I went down to the edge of the water alone, and stood, a very small child, with the full tide at my feet. Along the smooth waters of the sound a path of sunshine carried the eye out to the open sea. It flashed on me that, if I dropped in and floated out, with endless sea around, I should be alone for ever and ever.
>
> The result was a consciousness of myself which set me thinking, yet not about myself. Instead, it caused doubt about whether the world I saw was in the least like the world other people saw. I tried hard to find out.[1]

The passage indicates how Oman's environment early stirred his reflective mind and foreshadowed his career as philosopher and theologian.

Oman said that at the age of fourteen, his ambition was no higher than "to ride a horse bare-backed and steer a boat in a gale."[2] But in due course he sought other skills and arrived at them with distinction. When he was seventeen he entered Edinburgh University, "a raw lad from the ends of the earth with little equipment, except a vast responsiveness to the intellectual

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[1] John Oman, The Natural and the Supernatural (Cambridge: University Press, 1931), pp. 136-37.

[2] Honest Religion, p. 36.

environment."[1] His mind was well-stored and, more important, his native gift of original thought was unimpaired.

Oman recorded the following event which occurred during his student days and made a lasting impression upon his thought. "When I was a student," he related, "a great crowd of us were addressed by some very distinguished people—Browning and Lowell and Helmholz and Virchow and Pasteur and Lesseps and Saffi." But the statement he most vividly remembered came from Lavaleye, a Belgian economist.

> He began, he said, by being of the school of Mill, with everything determined by supply and demand, with freedom mainly in political safeguards for freedom of exchange. But one day he was struck by the singular fact that all Christian countries, with the possible exception of Russia, were in some real sense free, and that no other country was so in any real sense. Then he saw that freedom depended, not on political safeguards, but on the people for whom freedom was dearer than life, and that this went back to the great demand, "Let a man deny himself."[2]

This incident served to impress the significance of freedom upon one who would give it much emphasis in later years.

When Oman enrolled in the University of Edinburgh, the Robertson-Smith controversy was at its height and left a deep impression upon him. Oman felt that Robertson Smith was a man loyal to the spirit of investigation, being condemned for vanity by people who did not know and did not want to know

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[1] John Oman, "Method in Theology," The Expositor (Ninth Series, Vol. IV, 1925), p. 437.

[2] John Oman, Concerning the Ministry (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1936), p. 13.

the truth. Oman acknowledged that his own understanding of the issues was at the time perhaps immature and uninformed; even so, the event troubled him deeply.[1] He explained:

> What influenced me at the time was not criticism, but the ecclesiastical attitude towards it. This was expressed by a lawyer of my acquaintance, in a way which shocked me all the more that he was a really good man as well as a most devout elder of the Free Church. "Granting," he said, "that Robertson Smith is right, if it is truth, it is dangerous truth, and he has no right, as a professor of the Church, to upset the Church by declaring it." I hope I have not since weakened in my loyalty to truth, but in those days I thought intellectual truth the one worthy pursuit in life: and this suggested that the Church was not interested in it. Had I been then intending the ministry, probably I should have been put off it, but this affected me somewhat as a call to my life's work. . . . I was left no option between facing the search for a truth, which would shine in its own light in face of all inquiry, and complete scepticism.[2]

Brought up in the United Presbyterian Church, Oman decided to enter its ministry. "I did not want to be a minister," he said, "but somehow could not escape."[3] The ministerial training involved an Arts Course of four years, which Oman at that time had almost completed, followed by three years in the Church's Theological College. Having taken a distinguished place in the classes required for the ordinary degree, Oman attended the advanced classes and graduated in 1882 with first class honors in Philosophy.[4]

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[1] "Method in Theology," p. 452.

[2] John Oman, Vision and Authority (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2nd ed. 1928), pp. 9-10. See Appendix A at the end of this thesis.

[3] Concerning the Ministry, p. 33.

[4] "First Class Certificate of Merit," of the University of Edinburgh, dated 1881-82 and signed by A.C. Fraser, Professor, (continued on page 8)

With his distinguished record at Edinburgh University, Oman was awarded the Gray and Rhind Scholarships which were open to graduates of the University, and proceeded to the theological college of the United Presbyterian Church, also in Edinburgh. As the classes were recognized by the University for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity, he added that to his Arts degree.[1]

Oman's personal characteristics at this time apparently did not foretell the magnitude he would achieve in his profession, for one fellow-student wrote:

> Among many unexpected turns in Oman's career, the most unlikely was that the dreamy, shy youth who addressed fellow-students of his own Church with such diffidence, and at whom we were apt to smile, until we found he was always worth listening to, should have come to speak with confidence and authority to men of all Churches. . . .
>
> In the critical years. . . great thinking strove with limitations of oral expression, in circumstances where the value of the latter could not be despised and, so far as his chosen profession was concerned, narrowly escaped defeat.[2]

Oman himself was keenly conscious of his limitations of speech. In later

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(continuing footnote 4 from page 7) shows that Oman "acquitted himself with high distinction," and "obtained the second prize." The Certificate is now in the library of Westminster College, Cambridge.

[1] Alphabetical List of Graduates of the University of Edinburgh from 1859 to 1888 (Edinburgh: Published by order of the Senatus Academicus by James Thin, no date), p. 67.

[2] Alexander, op. cit., pp. xv-xvi.

years, addressing himself to young ministers, he declared:

> You cannot have less natural gift for free speech than I had, nor possibly receive less encouragement to try. One friend said, "It is no use. Your written word seldom lacks character, your spoken word has none." Another said, "What on earth took you to-day? I heard your voice certainly, but not one word that was yours." . . . Wherefore, though it tried the long-suffering of the audience and distressed myself, I persisted. As these talks may show, the result still is nothing to boast of.[1]

During Oman's student days many students of the United Presbyterian College went for summer terms in German universities, particularly to Erlangen. In the summer of 1883, accordingly, Oman went there and attended the lectures of Frank, Zahn, Class and Hauck. The theological society welcomed him to guest membership and this contributed to the educational value of the term. Two summers later, Oman went to the University of Heidelberg where the chief attractions were Hausrath in New Testament Introduction, Merz on the Psalms, Bartsch on German Literature and Kuno Fischer on Faust.[2] After the summer in Heidelberg, Oman proceeded to Neuchâtel where he remained nearly three months and gained fluency in French. He already had a thorough knowledge of German and was able in later years to be very much at home in speaking on the Continent.

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[1] Concerning the Ministry, p. 190.

[2] John Oman, "Germany, Fifty Years Apart," British Weekly (Vol. XCVII, January 24, 1935), p. 347. Cf. Alexander, op. cit., p. xviii.

The value of his study in Germany was recognized by F.R. Tennant, who said: "It was German theology . . . that stimulated and directed his researches by supplying him with products of thought congenial to his own habit of mind."[1] During this period of his life, Oman was already in agreement with the cardinal principles of Ritschlianism and had become deeply interested in Schleiermacher's thought.[2] This interest later resulted in Oman's first published work, the translation of Schleiermacher's Speeches on Religion.[3]

After Oman returned from Neuchâtel he was licensed to the Presbyterian ministry and became a Probationer of the United Presbyterian Church, seeking to obtain a charge. The method by which Probationers obtained pastorates at that time was this: A small committee within the Presbytery sent to the vacant congregations several probationers, each of whom would preach two Sundays. After hearing several prospects, the Congregation would select their preference.[4] The system obviously depended heavily upon the pulpit gifts of the prospective young ministers. Although Oman preached in a number of vacant churches, he lacked what was termed a

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[1]Tennant, op. cit., pp. 333-34.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher, On Religion, Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers, trans. John Oman (London: Kegan Paul, French, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1893), with introduction by the translator.

[4]James Brown, The Life of a Scottish Probationer (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1877), pp. 85-87.

good delivery, and the quality of his sermons was often overlooked as a consequence. Eventually he took charge of a preaching station at Makerstoun, near Kelso, where for a few months he walked several miles from Kelso for the Sunday services. After a time he became assistant at St. James Church, Paisley, of which Dr. James Brown was the minister.[1] Dr. Brown was a man of great charm who had a large and devoted congregation, and in Oman he found one whom he learned to love and trust completely as an assistant.[2]

Something of Oman's personality and character at this stage of his development may be seen in the following description by a friend:

> Anyone who wanted proof of Oman's inner quality, and who therefrom would have forecast his career, had only to see him as I first saw him, sailing an open boat on a wide sea! It was in Orkney, in Stromness, where his home was. . . .
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> . . .The first man I sought in Stromness was John Oman, at that time a probationer, though already assistant to Dr. James Brown of Paisley. He invited me to a set of tennis. . . .It was a calm afternoon; and, being neither of us a master of the game, Oman suggested a sail. Soon we were slipping out of the bay, I forward, Oman at the rudder. We had a long afternoon and evening (It was early June and in a northern latitude) and the skipper thought we might make for the "Old Man of Hoy," or at least might get a nearer view of that solemn and upstanding rock.
>
> It was there and then that I saw Oman as God had made him and as he throughout "obeyed his own commandment."
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> It did not occur to me to chatter. Neither did he speak. An open boat on the Pentland Firth is enough occupation for a man.
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> We had sailed for a matter of an hour or so, into the afternoon sun, when I heard him say, "I think we'll put about." Put about we did, and at the same moment he gave his boat all the breeze she

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[1] Tennant, op. cit., p. 658.

[2] Alexander, op. cit., p. xix.

> could gather. Soon there was a wind in pursuit of us and by the time we got inside the harbour it was blowing hard. He seemed, even there and then, and on that issue, to be given to discerning the signs of the times.[1]

During his months at Paisley, Oman continued to preach in various churches in the area and toward the end of 1889 he accepted a call to be minister of Clayport Street Church, Alnwick, Northumberland. Thus he passed into the Presbyterian Church of England, and was to remain in its service to the end of his life.[2] Although the Alnwick Church had for some time been closed down, it responded to Oman's leadership and he remained there for seventeen years, during which time the Church grew both in size and depth.[3]

To the Alnwick days Oman owed his first acquaintance with Miss Mary Hannah Blair, daughter of Mr. Hunter Blair of Gosforth. This acquaintance led to their marriage in 1897.

> Already John Oman was known to the discriminating all over the land, and to the natural grace and charm of a young wife there was added from the beginning a natural and proper pride in his distinction as a scholar and as a student. The natural and proper pride continued all through the intervening years, corroborated as it was increasingly by John Oman's increasing recognition by the world.[4]

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[1]"John Oman: In Memoriam," British Weekly (CVI, May 25, 1939), pseudo. Watchman, p. 126.

[2]Tennant, op. cit., p. 658.

[3]"News of the Churches," British Weekly (Vol. XVIII, May 16, 1895), p. 59.

[4]"Mrs. John Oman," British Weekly (Vol. CI, December 24, 1936), p. 314.

Oman used to enjoy relating that on the first service after returning from his honeymoon, he took as his text Psalm 67: "Lord bless and pity us." Pity, however, was not a term applicable to their union. Mrs. Oman was able in succeeding years to prove her capacity in the home and in the church work, and was also the "mentor which the rather absent-minded ways of her husband at times needed."[1]

While in Alnwick, Oman accomplished what, "regarded as the first fruits of his studies, must be deemed a notable achievement."[2] He translated Schleiermacher's Speeches on Religion, a work which, though epoch-making for theological thought, had not previously appeared in the English language. Oman recorded an experience which he had soon after his translation was published.

> A venerable German professor of a simple and benevolent frame of mind, when . . . I was introduced to him as one who had recently translated Schleiermacher's Speeches on Religion into English for the first time, regarded me as a person of dubious veracity. He was quite convinced that the book must have been already in English for the best part of a century; and, considering the multitude of German theological works which, in that interval, had not only been translated but had found their way to lighting material and not intellectual fires, his scepticism was justified.[3]

It was while he was at Alnwick that Oman's quality as an unusually learned, powerful, and original thinker in the field of theology began to be

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[1]Alexander, op. cit., p. xxi.

[2]G. K. MacBean, "An Appreciation of Dr. Oman," The Modern Churchman (XXI, No. 11, February, 1932), p. 596.

[3]John Oman, Review of The Christian Faith, British Weekly, (Vol. LXXXV, February 28, 1929), p. 493.

more widely known, primarily through the publication in 1902 of Vision and Authority. The book "revealed a mind singularly able to keep profound and informed theological reflection in close relation with the religious life and its problems."[1] With its publication he seemed suddenly to be brought into prominence. As one reviewer put it: "It is seldom indeed that a reviewer has the good fortune to come upon a book like this, by which a comparatively unknown author passes at a bound into the front ranks of serious religious thinkers."[2] With Oman's new prominence came additional invitations for lectureships and new positions. In the next four years he declined a Professorship at Ormand College, University of Melbourne, Australia, and a Chair of Systematic Theology in Chicago.[3]

In 1904 Oman received his degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Edinburgh. That year also found him temporarily occupied in a place where he later was to serve permanently, Westminster College, Cambridge, for it was that year that he delivered the Westminster

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[1]Tennant, op. cit., p. 658.

[2]"The Seat of Authority," Glasgow Herald (No. 119, May 19, 1902), p. 286.

[3]"News of the Churches," British Weekly (Vols. XXXII and XXXIX, July 9, 1902 and March 22, 1906), pp. 286 and 673.

Association Lectures[1] on "Some Inherited Problems of Theology."[2]

In January, 1906, Oman delivered the Kerr Lectures at the Glasgow College of the United Free Church of Scotland. This was a special honor since he was the first non-member of the United Free Church to be invited by the Kerr Trustees. Oman acknowledged this honor and added humorously: "Though I am a child of one of the churches now so truly united in her fold, I have all my ministry been what I fear she regards as a 'stranger of the Dispersion' in England."[3] The lectures which Oman gave at Glasgow were a revision and expansion of what he had given at Westminster College in 1904, and were published in November, 1906, as The Problem of Faith and Freedom in the Last Two Centuries. The book "evinces that the writer's independence of thought was proportionate to his capacity for absorption."[4]

In 1907 Oman sailed for the United States where he delivered a series of lectures to the students of Auburn Theological Seminary in New York.[5]

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[1]"Ministerial Training: College," Digest of the Proceedings of the Synods of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1876-1905, compiled by Samuel William Carruthers (London: Publishing Office of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1907), p. 275.

[2]According to Professor H.H. Farmer, these lectures were not published and are not available among Dr. Oman's private papers. The title was given in the above referenced article in the Digest of Proceedings.

[3]Faith and Freedom, pp. vi-viii.

[4]Tennant, op. cit., p. 336.

[5]"News of the Churches," British Weekly (Vol. XLI, February 7, 1907), p. 501.

The publication of Vision and Authority and The Problem of Faith and Freedom in the Last Two Centuries had brought Oman a reputation as "one of the Church's great philosophers, and at once marked him out for a professorial chair."[1] In 1907 he was nominated for the Chair of Systematic Theology at Westminster College, Cambridge, which had been vacated by Principal Dykes' retirement. Two other men, D.S. Cairns and P. Carnegie Simpson were seriously considered by the presbyteries for the position. At his own request, Cairn's name was withdrawn, and at the annual assembly, Oman was elected over Simpson for the chair.[2]

When he accepted his new position in May, 1907, Oman told his Alnwick congregation that, while he had been called to a wider sphere of labor and would have more to do with the Church in general, he would not lose touch with the congregation at Alnwick which had meant so much to him during his ministry.[3] The congregation "left Mrs. Oman and himself in no doubt that the ties forged between members and minister would, as he hoped, be enduring."[4] Years later a visitor to the community reported

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[1]"The Rev. Dr. J.W. Oman, Westminster College, Cambridge," The Times (No. 48,308, May 18, 1939), p. 21.

[2]Digest of the Proceedings of the Synods of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1906-1920, compiled by Samuel William Carruthers (London: Publishing Office of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1907), p. 147. Dr. Oman received 402 of 503 votes cast.

[3]"News of the Churches," British Weekly (XLII, May 16, 1907), p. 141.

[4]Alexander, op. cit., p. xxii.

that "the farm labourers still look back with happy memories to the time when 'the Doctor' was among them."[1]

Oman was inducted at Westminster College on October 10, 1907, along with Anderson Scott, newly-elected Professor of New Testament.[2] The Rev. Dr. Monro Gibson, acting Principal of the College, conducted the service and gave the charge.[3]

> The first part of it referred to the interesting time in which the new professors were entering upon their duties—a time of transition, which was trying men's souls; a time following a period of destructive criticism that had shaken everything in Christianity which could be shaken; a time when the inspiring work of reconstruction had begun. They would, therefore take their places amongst the "repairers of breaches" and the builders of a twentieth century "Temple of Faith," which would be greater and grander than any that had preceded it.[4]

During his early years at Westminster College, Oman was one of a remarkably distinguished teaching staff. Dr. John Skinner in Old Testament, Professor Charles Anderson Scott in New Testament, Professor P. Carnegie Simpson in Church History, and Dr. Oman in Dogmatics and Philosophy of Religion formed "that quattuorvirate which for many years adorned its lecture rooms."[5]

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[1]"The New Principal, An Appreciation," op. cit., p. 289.

[2]"Ministerial Training: College," op. cit., p. 289.

[3]"Westminster College, Cambridge," British Weekly (Vol.XLIII, October 17, 1907), p. 29.

[4]Ibid., p. 41.

[5]John Kenneth Mozley, Some Tendencies in British Theology from the Publication of Lux Mundi to the Present Day (London: S.P.C.K., 1951), p. 161.

Oman quickly won the hearts of his students by his bold and fearless expression of truth as he had himself experienced it, and by the up-to-date methods he took to correlate his views with the problems of modern life.[1] His teaching was

> always stimulating because always exacting, never ornate but pointed by memorable sayings, profound because it was always concerned with reality. He was a great teacher of religion because he was a religious teacher, and religion for him was concerned with the whole of life.[2]

Of all the values of his new position, Oman valued most the close relation between professor and student which was possible in a residential college like Westminster. "To be with him on a Sunday and find his students dropping in . . . was to realize a relationship a classroom by itself could never give."[3]

Oman's magnitude as a profound scholar and original thinker was fully recognized in the University of Cambridge. The University admitted him to its privileges as it had other Westminster Professors not already Cambridge graduates, by conferring the honorary degree of M.A. and making him a member of Queens' College.[4] For many years he served on the

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[1]"The Rev. Dr. J.W. Oman, Westminster College, Cambridge," op. cit., p. 21.

[2]R. D. Whitehorn, "Obituary, The Rev. John Oman," The Cambridge Review (LX, May 26, 1939, No. 1480), p. 423.

[3]Alexander, op. cit., p. xxiii.

[4]Cambridge University Calendar (Cambridge: University Press, 1930), p. 588.

University's Faculty of Divinity and on its Degree Committee.[1] Through these activities, and through his lectures and books, he came to be one of the strongest influences in the study of the philosophy of religion in Cambridge. The following evaluation of Oman's contribution to the University has been given by one of the professors:

> On the Faculty Board, though not himself directly concerned with the details of University routine and administration, Oman's learning and wide range of scholarship, and his deep interest in education as something much greater than mere instruction, gave great weight to his opinion on all questions that concerned the policy of the Faculty. His service to the Degree Committee was especially notable, and it was far from being confined to opinions on works in the Philosophy of Religion. His shrewdness and humour, and his dislike of sham or pretentious work could make him a severe critic where severity was deserved; but his judgment was always generous in its recognition of good work and of promise, especially in the young student. His knowledge of men and things, his great powers of observation, and that direct and profound acquaintance with simple and unsophisticated things, which was one of his outstanding characteristics, gave sureness and originality to all his judgments, and enabled him always to penetrate to the heart of the matter. Members of the Faculty who learned from his wisdom and enjoyed his friendship cherish their memory of him.[2]

When Oman had been at Westminster College three years, he was chosen by his alma mater, the University of Edinburgh, to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity. The Dean of the Faculty of Divinity presented him to the Senatus by saying:

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[1] Tennant, op. cit., p. 336.

[2] Mr. Boys Smith, now Bursar of St. John's College, Cambridge, quoted by Farmer, "Memoir," p. xxx.

> On three separate occasions Mr. Oman has already appeared at your hands and those of your predecessors to receive degrees in Arts, Divinity and Philosophy—an almost unique record. . . . He appears by invitation of the Senatus to receive an honorary degree in harmony with the position which he has gained as a theologian and the office which he holds.[1]

Oman published The Church and the Divine Order in 1911. In 1913 his name was mentioned in connection with the vacancy in the Glasgow United Free College occasioned by the death of Professor James Orr.[2] Upon hearing of the matter, Oman's Presbytery, the London North Presbytery, adopted a resolution expressing deep concern at the possibility of his being called to Glasgow, and their earnest hope that he would remain in the Presbyterian Church, "to whose welfare and progress he seems at the present time to be indispensable."[3] The resolution pointed out that a new and higher ideal of personal devotion and ministerial efficiency was at work in the Church and that this could be traced largely to Oman's influence over the younger ministers.[4] A month after that resolution, Oman appeared before the Presbytery and stated that he "had been led to see that it was his duty . . . to live and labour in England, where the great religious

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[1] "British Table Talk," British Weekly (Vol. XLVIII, July 18, 1910), p.378.

[2] "News of the Churches," British Weekly (Vol. LV, December 18, 1913), p. 392.

[3] "News of the Churches," British Weekly (Vol. LV, March 12, 1914), p. 704.

[4] Ibid.

problems of the day are centered."[1]

Between 1913 and 1916 Oman was appointed by Cambridge University as its Stanton Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion, the first Nonconformist to hold that important office.[2] He was to serve two other terms as Stanton Lecturer: 1919-1922, and 1929-1932.[3]

World War I brought a radical reduction in the enrollment of Westminster College during 1914-1916, and in 1917 the College Committee decided not to reopen the College. The few students exempt from military service on medical grounds were removed to Birmingham where Professors Oman and Scott supervised their work.[4] The Birmingham Presbytery gave seats to Professors Oman and Scott, and Dr. Oman's time was abundantly occupied with maintaining the services of churches without ministers, visiting military hospitals, and giving numerous addresses in an effort to keep up the spirit of the people during the trying days.[5]

The problems of war led Oman in 1915 to publish The War and Its

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[1]"News of the Churches," British Weekly (Vol. LVI, April 16, 1914), p. 704.

[2]Ibid., (May 15, 1913), p. 178.

[3]Farmer, Dictionary of National Biography, p. 658.

[4]"Ministerial Training: College," loc. cit. Dr. Oman's daughter, Miss Maisie Oman, does not remember that Dr. Scott was with them in Birmingham; therefore, there may be a discrepancy in the record here.

[5]"Home Mission: General," Digest of Proceedings, 1906-1920, loc. cit.

Issues, an "attempt at a Christian judgment of war."[1] During the war years, under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A., he visited the troops in France. His experiences there left deep and lasting impressions on Oman's sensitive spirit. Years later he told of being at a memorial ceremony in Cambridge when his imagination took him back to those experiences:

> I was in a street in Boulogne. A young lad stood before me, from whom I had parted a few weeks before. Then his face was full of the joy of life. Now, a few days before, he had left three hundred of his comrades behind him at Neuve Chapelle, and his face had the haggard, dazed look of a child that had lost all its bearings in the dark. Then I was with another lad from Hill 60, dying slowly, not in pain but in terrible tension, of a bullet through his spine, in a little hospital at the Forward Base, beseeching me to write his mother assuring her that he was all right. . . . And I was in the cemetery in Rouen after the Somme, amid the rows of graves to which the young and strong were being gathered to the dust. The rest was all painting on the surface: this was the true vision to be seen in the mirror of the war.[2]

Late in 1917 Oman's Grace and Personality appeared. Although the book had its groundwork in a series of articles which appeared in The Expositor,[3] it had been entirely rewritten in the light of the war and Oman's experiences in the camps and hospitals. He explained the appearance of

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[1] John Oman, The War and Its Issues (Cambridge: University Press, 1915), preface, unnumbered page.

[2] John Oman, "Turfing the Grave," Dialogue With God (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1950), pp. 45-46.

[3] John Oman, "Personality and Grace," The Expositor (Eighth Series, Vol. II, October and December, 1911), pp. 358-67, 456-63; Vol. III, February, March, May , June, 1912), pp. 171-78, 236-42, 468-75, 528-34; (Vol. IV, July, August, September, October, November and December, 1912), pp. 57-60, 138-42, 252-62 , 354-62, 414-23, 526-38.

the book in this way:

> What has waited so long, it may be thought, might have waited till the end of the War afforded more leisure and calm of mind for studies which, to most people, will seem remote from all issues of the conflict. Yet the work, as it now stands, is the effect of the war. It scattered my students, interrupted more directly historical and philosophical studies into which an appointment to the University lectureship on the Philosophy of Religion at Cambridge had led me, sent me into camps and hospitals, where fundamental religious questions were constantly being discussed, and forced upon me the reconsideration of my whole religious position. Moreover, the fact that such sorrow and wickedness could happen in the world, became the crucible in which my whole view of the world had to be tested.
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> . . .As, during the years in which the book was being written, I was living, at home or in France, continually among the men in the army, and saw the large company of my student friends sorrowfully dwindling, and was called with bitter frequency to mourn with the companions of my youth and others near and dear, my success may not have been equal to my intention. But that, I trust, will not obscure the conviction, which these years have only strengthened, that the greatest need, even of our needy time, is a religion shining in its own light, and that greater than all political securities for peace, would be a Christian valuation of men and means, souls and things.[1]

After the war Westminster College resumed its work in Cambridge and Dr. Oman returned to his teaching activities. In 1921 he published a volume of his sermons, The Paradox of the World.

At the English Presbyterian Church's General Assembly in May, 1921, Principal John Skinner announced that he intended to resign the Principalship of Westminster College at the next meeting of the Assembly.[2]

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[1] John Oman, Grace and Personality (Cambridge: University Press, 1917), pp. v-vi.

[2] "An Assembly Diary," The Monthly Messenger of the Presbyterian Church of England (No. 927, June, 1922), p. 128.

The three other Westminster Professors—Anderson Scott, Carnegie Simpson and Oman—were all qualified and would have been reasonable choices for the Principalship. Consequently, all three were nominated by various presbyteries.[1] When the Assembly met in early May, 1922, it was "charged with a certain electricity of excitement," because of the "embarrassing range of choice" presented by the nominations.[2] "All the speeches in support of the nominees were in excellent taste. . . but the outstanding speech was certainly that of the Rev. Roderick Macleod on behalf of Professor Oman."[3] The assembly was visibly impressed and the result of the ballot showed that Professor Oman had been elected.[4] He signified his acceptance[5] while the speeches of both Scott and Simpson revealed an attitude of loyal support and cooperation.[6]

Oman was inaugurated as Principal of Westminster College in October, 1922. His inaugural address, "Method in Theology," was "massive in form, packed with thought, and it covered a very wide area, no less

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[1]"News of the Churches," British Weekly (Vol. LXXI, October 6, November 10, December 8 and 15, 1921), pp. 18, 138, 250, 274; (February 2, 1922), p. 408; (October 13, 1921), p. 42.

[2]"An Assembly Diary," loc. cit.

[3]"News of the Churches," British Weekly (LXXII, May 11, 1922), p. 118.

[4]"Dr. Oman Elected Principal," Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England (Vol. XVI, 1922-24), p. 61.

[5]"Dr. Oman Accepts Appointment," Ibid., p. 62.

[6]"An Assembly Diary," op. cit., p. 131.

than 'the study of theology'. He urged again and again the necessity for seeking absolute truth."[1] He made it plain, however, that his primary interest was still his teaching. "The office I would magnify is still my old calling of a teacher of theology, and did this office make that secondary it would be a very Irish promotion."[2]

The variety of Oman's interest as a scholar was illustrated in 1923 when he branched out from his usual area of thought to publish The Book of Revelation, in which he propounded an ingenious and attractive theory of the composition of that much disputed book. He apparently spent extensive time on the subject of the Apocalypse, for his next book, five years later, was entitled The Text of Revelation.

In 1928, twenty-six years after its original publication, Vision and Authority was reissued. Principal Oman related an interesting anecdote to explain the reissue:

> One day, happening to be in Edinburgh, I ran across an old friend whom I had not seen for some years. "Having now," he said, "like the old lady, become an 'octogeranium,' I no longer read theology, but get my theology from the poets. There is, however, one book I read a great deal, which may or may not be an exception, because I don't know whether it is theology or not. It is called Vision and Authority. Do you, I wonder, ever read it?" I said I had not opened it for many years. "I thought as much," he said. "But take my advice and read it. I know it

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[1]"Westminster College, Cambridge," British Weekly (Vol. LXXIII, October 12, 1922), p. 29.

[2]Oman, "Method in Theology," p. 438.

> will do you good." As soon as I could find time I followed his advice: and this re-issue is the result.[1]

When Professor Oman reached his late sixties he looked back over several decades of theological development and gave a valuable characterization of his age:

> Not fifteen years ago. . . but nearer fifty, my generation. . . found themselves theologically homeless.
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> The earlier generation, even Robertson Smith himself, thought that criticism was only a matter of dates; on mine came the stress of the conviction that the old foundation had vanished. Not a soul helped us to rebuild. We dug clay out of German tomes, and our style suffered from evil communications; we had still to make bricks, and there was no straw. In the Anglican Church patrons sometimes came to the rescue, but where there was popular election we wandered in the wilderness for years; and no wonder, for we were not sure of what to say, and we had mastered no popular form in which to say it. But we did begin to see that there were foundations, and that, though the religion that had been built on an external authority had fallen, there were dim outlines to be seen of a different kind of Christianity, which had, as it were, been the steel frame all the time, and which stood in its own strength. About our individual contributions we have reason to be modest. Perhaps there is nothing like a great book in the whole production. Yet a great change of view has taken place.[2]

In 1928 Dr. Oman was honored by Oxford University with the degree Doctor of Divinity. When he was introduced it was said of him,"Dr. Oman has made it his purpose in his books to resolve some of the apparent

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[1] Vision and Authority, preface to second edition, pp. 9-11. After the second edition, the work continued unaltered through six more editions, the eighth being published in 1948 with an introduction by T.W. Manson, and the fifth being published in the United States as well as in England.

[2] John Oman, Review of H.R.L. Sheppard's The Impatience of a Parson, British Weekly (LXXXIII, October 27, 1927), p. 84.

contradictions in the relation of God and man."[1] The following year, 1929, Oman was invited to address a gathering of Scottish ministers belonging to the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland. His lectures were published in a small pamphlet entitled The Office of the Ministry.

Dr. Oman's retirement had been scheduled, along with that of Professor Scott, to take place in 1931. The Assembly of 1930, however, asked both men to continue for another year.[2] Both decided to remain, and Oman made their decision known to the Assembly.

> He had a great reception as he came forward to acknowledge the invitation. "Dr. Scott and I," he said, "are in your hands. We have come to the time when perhaps we no longer run and are not weary, but so long as we can go on and not faint, it is enough."[3]

Oman's own Church honored him in 1931 by electing him to its highest office, that of Moderator of the General Assembly. Prolonged applause greeted him to show how unanimous was the Assembly's choice. In a few dignified and feeling words, Dr. Robertson conveyed the decision to Oman, who thereupon proceeded to the pulpit to deliver the Moderator's

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[1]"Obituary, The Rev. Dr. J.W. Oman, Westminster College, Cambridge," The Times (May 18, 1939), p. 21.

[2]"Appointments," Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England (Vol. XVIII, 1928-30), p. 811.

[3]"The English Presbyterian Assembly," British Weekly (Vol. LXXXVIII, May 15, 1930), p. 132.

address.[1] The address dealt with the subject of the Reformed Creeds, with particular reference to the Westminster Confession.[2] In the course of the message he made a bold claim for a changed outlook in the attitude of the Westminster Confession in the light of facts of modern life, but claimed that at the center, the Confession's trust in God's truth afforded the strength and peace needed for this day.[3]

The attitude of the entire Church toward Dr. Oman's election as Moderator was expressed in the British Weekly:

> The Presbyterian Church of England, in honouring Principal Oman by nominating him as its forthcoming Moderator, has indeed honoured itself. Dr. Oman occupies in the religious life of England a place altogether his own. Amongst the younger men in his own Church his influence has been decisive. His books . . . for those who were fortunate enough to encounter them while their minds were still susceptible to theological truth, were final, putting an end to hesitations on what might be called the final controversy. Those who have been fortunate enough to be his personal friends are his hopeless debtors.[4]

When Oman's tenure as Moderator came to a close in May, 1932, a vote of appreciation was given him by the Assembly and he replied:

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[1]"The English Presbyterian Assembly," British Weekly (Vol. XC, May 7, 1931), p. 107.

[2]"The Moderator's Address," The Monthly Messenger of the Presbyterian Church of England (No. 1035, June, 1931), pp. 48-50.

[3]"Dr. Oman on a Changed Outlook," The Times (No. 45,814, May 5, 1931), p. 11.

[4]"British Table Talk," British Weekly (Vol. LXXXIX, November 6, 1930), p. 113.

> This would be a drab world if our friends did not sometimes think of us better than our merits. When I was called to the task I found myself with a big book on my hands which, if not a sprightly piece of work, yet was laborious. Also I had attained a span of years which the Psalmist thought the limit of human activity. Consequently, I might be excused if I did not regard the honour with radiant enthusiasm. Yet, if my year of office has not done much for others, it has done a great deal for me. I know, as I should not otherwise have known, how thoughtful people in all the churches are being brought back, by the very difficulties of the temporal, to the unseen and the spiritual.[1]

The book to which Oman referred in the above speech was The Natural and The Supernatural which he issued in 1931. It was an "extensive philosophico-religious inquiry, exploring why and how the concern of religion must both flow out of and into right relations with the world."[2]

As previously noted, Oman had been due to retire in 1932, but the Assembly had persuaded him to remain for another year. At the 1932 Assembly, Oman was persuaded again to delay his retirement. "Those of us," said Dr. George Alexander, "who have been toiling after Dr. Oman through The Natural and The Supernatural, have got a vivid sense that so far from his retiring, it is the rest of us who ought to be retiring and leave him standing."[3] Consequently, Dr. Oman agreed to remain, and his retirement was delayed, at the request of succeeding assemblies, until 1935.

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[1] Margaret A. Sutherland, "The English Presbyterian Assembly," British Weekly (Vol. XCII, May 5, 1932), p.88.

[2] John Macleod, "John Oman, As Theologian," The Hibbert Journal (XLVIII, October, 1949 - July, 1950), pp. 348-49.

[3] Sutherland, op. cit., p. 88.

At the Westminster College Commemoration Day in 1934, the Rev. R.D. Whitehorn (who later became Principal of Westminster College) presented a portrait of Principal Oman which had been painted by Mr. Hugh G. Rivière. The artist told how some visitors to his studio had seen in the portrait "a saint, others a sailor." He himself thought he had combined in it three main characteristics: the divine, the philosopher, and the Norseman.[1] As Mr. Whitehorn officially presented the portrait he said that it depicted Oman as his students had often seen him, in the act of answering a question in the classroom. "It recalled in a striking way the titles of two of Dr. Oman's works: for it combined Grace . . . with Personality, and Vision with Authority."[2]

In 1935 Commemoration Day at Westminster College marked Oman's last official appearance, for at the end of that session he retired as Principal and Professor. "His own mood was genial and cheerful as usual. . . yet it was natural that the general satisfaction at the present prosperity and happy prospects of the College should be tempered by the sorrow that belongs to life's changes and farewells."[3] At the luncheon following the

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[1] "Westminster College, Cambridge, Commemoration Day," British Weekly (Vol. XCIV, June 15, 1933), p. 209.

[2] "Westminster College, Cambridge, Commemoration Day," British Weekly (Vol. XCVI, June 14, 1934), p. 218.

[3] F. W. Armstrong, "Westminster College, Cambridge, Commemoration Day," British Weekly (Vol. XCVII, June 20, 1935), p. 233.

commemoration service, Dr. Alexander told of Oman's new honor: an Honorary Fellowship of Jesus College, Cambridge. Speeches of appreciation were made by representatives of different areas of Church and University life. Oman was presented with a replica of his portrait and a ticket for a cruise to the Norwegian fjords for him and Mrs. Oman.[1] In acknowledging the gifts and speeches, he spoke with characteristic modesty, not of what he had done, but of the great opportunity he had had and the generous help he had received from his colleagues, his students, and his friends in the University.[2]

Upon Oman's retirement, his former student and colleague, Professor T. W. Manson, ably expressed what Oman's work at Westminster College had meant to the College and the Church:

> It has meant that Westminster College has gained a recognized place as a great theological college in a University where theological learning is associated with names like Westcott, Hort, Lightfoot and Burkitt. The recognition of the College has been no mere matter of courtesy; it has been a real acceptance based on the knowledge that such men as Dr. Oman were maintaining there the highest standards of study and teaching in the highest and most exacting of subjects.
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> It has meant that the library of theology has been enriched by a series of works of outstanding value, all marked by the same qualities of deep religious insight, sure faith, and determined

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[1] J. L. Cottle and A.S. Cooper, "Westminster College Bulletin," The Monthly Messenger of the Presbyterian Church of England (No. 1085) (August, 1935), p. 230.

[2] Armstrong, op. cit., p. 233.

honesty in facing theological problems.

> Above all, the work of Dr. Oman in the College has meant that for twenty-eight years those qualities of heart and mind have been placed unstintedly at the service of successive generations of students for the ministry. Year by year men have been sent out to our congregations equipped with all that Dr. Oman's insight and learning could give them, and—what is more valuable still—fired by his own example of single-minded devotion to the truth. There are many men in the ranks of the ministry today who are able to face the difficulties and perplexities of our time with some sort of inner serenity and courage because they once sat at the feet of a real hero of faith, one who never shirks a difficulty, is never content merely to defeat the opposition in argument, one who all through has striven for a unified vision of God, man, and the world, and wrought for nothing less than that the whole truth that makes us free.[1]

The Presbyterian Church recognized Oman as Principal Emeritus and gave him a seat in the London North Presbytery.[2] Rev. H. H. Farmer, who had been teaching at Hartford Theological Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut, U.S.A., and was a former student of Oman's at Cambridge, succeeded him in the Chair of Dogmatics and occupied the chair until his retirement in 1960. The new Principal was Dr. W.A.L. Elmslie, who had served as both student and professor under Oman.[3]

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[1] T. W. Manson, "Dr. John Oman," The Presbyterian Messenger (No. 1084, July, 1935), pp. 199-200.

[2] "Retirement of Principal Oman," The Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England (Vol. XX, 1935-36),

[3] "The New Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge," The Presbyterian Messenger (No. 1085, August, 1935), pp. 229-30.

Within a year of his retirement, Oman issued Concerning the Ministry, a book consisting of informal but meaningful talks which he had made to his students on the practical side of their vocation.

When he retired, Dr. and Mrs. Oman first thought of making a new home away from Cambridge, but after looking around for several months, they returned to occupy a house on Hills Road. There was no sign of impending tragedy and every prospect of a pleasant retirement among old friends. Only a few weeks had passed, however, when Mrs. Oman was stricken with a fatal illness. She passed away just before Christmas, 1936.[1] Though he continued to work, Oman never fully recovered from his wife's death. "A weariness crept into his life, though he was always ready to speak of his good fortune in the loyalty and devotion of his daughters, and his younger sister who now made her home with him."[2]

In July, 1938, Oman was elected to the Fellowship of the British Academy. Though he appreciated the honour, he felt he was no longer able to do anything to support it. His term was very brief. About the same time as his election, a malady overtook him which prevented his travelling and attending the meetings.[3] For some time it was known that Oman was

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[1] Alexander, op. cit., and "Mrs. John Oman," British Weekly, loc. cit.

[2] Alexander, op. cit., p. xxiv.

[3] Tennant, op. cit., p. 333.

suffering from a weakness of the heart, and a serious attack confined him to bed in May, 1939. Although he was not thought to be in immediate danger, he "died with a sudden peacefulness on Wednesday morning, May 17, 1939."[1]

> Death touched him as he was writing . . . to his oldest friend and life-long intimate. . . whom. . . he regarded as of his own rank in things of the mind, who could understand his thoughts afar off.[2] More than that, and something which might later be regarded as mystical—the very last words John Oman put on paper were—"and so he died." In that same instant, that questing spirit entered upon the scene where the faithful see Him Whom, having not seen, they loved.[2]

When a few days later Oman was laid to rest, the assemblage in the Presbyterian Church in Cambridge was a remarkable tribute to the position the distinguished Principal had gained and to his wide range of scholarly and notable associates. The officiating clergy were Revs. T.R. Morton, James Fraser, Carnegie Simpson, and Rev. Dr. W.A.L. Elmslie.[3] He was buried at St. Giles Cemetery, Huntingdon Road, Cambridge. Professor H.H. Farmer described the loss of Dr. Oman in this way: "To look out across the world of religion and theology, with him no longer there, is as though one were to look one morning upon a familiar landscape and find that a

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[1] Watchman, op. cit., p. 126.

[2] Miss Maisie Oman recalled that this friend was Mr. George Alexander.

[3] "Obituary," The Times, loc. cit. Others listed in attendance at the funeral were various Principals and Masters of Cambridge Colleges; Rev. and Mrs. R.H. Strachan; Mr. and Mrs. T.R. Glover; Dr. and Mrs. Anderson Scott; Rev. Prof. H.H. Farmer; Professor C.H. Dodd, representing Mansfield College, Oxford; Dr. F.R. Tennant; Dr. Maitland, Rev. Professors J.M. Creed and F.S. Marsh; and Dr. and Mrs. John S. Whale.

great headland or peak has vanished overnight."[1]

After Oman's death, the manuscript of Honest Religion was found ready for the publishers. Although he had requested that nothing be published posthumously from his pen, his family felt that since this work was ready to have been submitted by himself, it should be made available for publication. Consequently, Honest Religion was published in 1941 with a Memoir of the Author by George Alexander and H.H. Farmer. The family, after much consideration, felt justified in publishing a volume of Dr. Oman's sermons delivered during his days as pastor. Thus, Dialogue With God appeared in 1950 as Oman's last published work.

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[1]H. H. Farmer, "Death of Dr. John Oman, An Appreciation," The Christian World (May 25, 1939), no page number.

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF SURVEY OF OMAN'S INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND AND HIS MAJOR THEOLOGICAL WRITINGS

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF SURVEY OF OMAN'S INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND AND HIS MAJOR THEOLOGICAL WRITINGS

John Oman was an English Presbyterian and was therefore within the historical framework of a Church which maintained the essential elements of a traditional and orthodox interpretation of the Christian faith. His Church was deeply conscious of its historical roots, acknowledged the critical approach to the Bible and the relativity of creeds and confessions and was characterized by a social and ethical concern in theology and practice. However, Oman should also be interpreted within the Liberal position of English theology in the sense that he reacted against the traditional "rigidities" of sacramental grace, Incarnational Christology, and traditional soteriology, and sought to orientate theology toward a theology of value and experience. His theology has therefore been characterized as an "adoptive traditionalism," which may be considered within the central trend of contemporary English theology alongside James Ward, Hastings Rashdall, A.E. Taylor, C.C.J. Webb, W.R. Sorley, and William Temple.[1]

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[1] W. Marshall Horton, Contemporary English Theology (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936), pp. 134ff. Cf. A.H. Thompson, "The Reformation," in Edward Gordon Selwyn, Essays Catholic and Critical (London: S.P.C.K., 1929), pp. 364ff.

It is difficult to trace the influences behind Oman's theology because of his reluctance to use references in his writings and because of the original stamp of his own mind. The traditional element in his thinking would quite naturally come from his Calvinistic background and the Presbyterian Churches in which he was trained and later served, and this influence should never be minimized. Nevertheless, the really creative stimulus for the distinctive elements of Oman's contribution to theology were provided by continental theology, especially Schleiermacher and Ritschl.

The theological affinity between Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Oman will be noticed throughout the exposition and evaluation of Oman's thought, but it will be helpful here to note the broad kinship between them. Oman appreciated the way Schleiermacher made religion a unique and original element in man's nature; both interpreted theology from an anthropocentric and experiential method; and both emphasized the will of the person and his dependence upon God. Oman believed that Schleiermacher's emphasis on religion as "the feeling of dependence" should not be interpreted primarily as an emotional feeling but as an intuitional awareness of ultimate reality[1], and Oman attempted to preserve this insight of Schleiermacher's throughout his own theology, especially in his interpretation of epistemology, authority, and religion. It was Schleiermacher, according to Oman,

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[1] Faith and Freedom, pp. 216-17.

who first realized the necessity of renovating theology and the Church by the ethical idea of personal freedom in God, and this insight set the task for English theology and was the controlling thesis behind Oman's theological work.[1]

Ritschlianism was interpreted to English theology primarily through Herrman and Kaftan, Pfleiderer and Weiss, but it is more likely that Oman received the Ritschlian influence during his study on the continent. Oman shared the Ritschlian emphasis on many themes, such as the anti-metaphysical and anti-mystical approach to theology, the secondary importance of institutions, reconciliation as forgiveness and the importance of a theology of value judgment and experience. Ritschlianism appealed to Oman because it offered a way of combining the insights of rationalism and the independence of the personality with the contribution of Schleiermacher, who saw the individual as a necessary but partial expression of the wonderful variety of the universe. According to Ritschl, man was a free being, aware of his absolute spiritual significance which he must maintain before a world antagonistic to him, and Oman believed that to learn this purpose hidden behind and within the world's antagonism, and glimpsed in man's awareness of his own worth, might be the substance of freedom and the essence of man's task. In order to conserve this emphasis, Oman sought to bring a reconciliation between the Ritschlian theology of value judgment and the traditional

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 328.

Augustinian-Calvinistic concept of the transcendence of God.[1]

The major thesis of Oman's theology may be characterized as a consistent presentation of the view that freedom in its fulness is possible only when it is firmly based upon a reality which faith apprehends and which sustains man's free action within the world, for man's great task is the discovery of a "rock in the stream on which to set the individual with his unchanging identity and his abiding responsibility."[2] The primary task of Oman's theology might be summarized, therefore, as the attempt to relate freedom, interpreted in its profoundest, personalistic sense, to the whole of theology in an adequate methodology, and in the concepts of authority, religion, grace and the Church.

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[1]All the British theologians who were sympathetically influenced by Ritschl welcomed the Dialectical Theology of Barth and Brunner except Oman and A.E. Garvie. (See John Dickie, Fifty Years of British Theology, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937, p. 101). Oman opposed the distinction of a qualitative nature between man and God,and the concept that God is totaliter aliter was unacceptable to him. Oman declared that Barth's books were the kind of materials which one gets together "before writing a book." On one occasion the students of Westminster College gave an amusing program in which they produced a book with the title, What I Owe to Karl Barth, by John Oman. The pages inside were blank. (See P. Carnegie Simpson, Recollections Mainly Ecclesiastical But Sometimes Human, London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1943, p. 65). Since many of the themes of the earlier Barthian theology have in recent years undergone change or modification, it would be interesting to know Oman's personal interpretation of Barthianism today. There is no question, however, that the two approaches to theology are in basic contrast to one another.

[2]Faith and Freedom, p. 237.

Before coming to an exposition of the major themes of Oman's theology, it will be helpful to see the larger pattern of his theological writings. Oman realized that in a sense he had worked backward in his writings for his earlier works give the fuller expression of his whole interpretation of the Christian religion, while his later books deal more with methodology and theological approach.

Only the major theological works have received attention in this chapter. The Book of Revelation and The Text of Revelation mainly consist of Oman's investigations into the field of textual criticism and have no really significant bearing on his contribution to theological thought.[1] F.R. Tennant's evaluation of Oman's work in this field best summarizes its importance for this study: "Apparently his adventure into the field of textual criticism is not deemed by expert students to have been as successful as his researches in other departments of theology."[2] Oman's volumes of sermons, The Paradox of the World and A Dialogue With God contribute nothing unique or distinctive to his theology, nor do they show any noticeable development in his thought. However, relevant passages from the sermons will be used in later chapters to illustrate his major theological themes.

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[1]The two books are, however, dealt with in Appendix B at the end of this thesis. Professor Donald McLeod, who was personally acquainted with Oman and is presently at Westminster College, Cambridge, once remarked to this writer that he thought Oman did his work on Revelation as some theologians read mystery stories—that is, primarily as a diversion from his field of work.

[2]Tennant, op. cit., p. 228.

John Oman's first major literary project was his translation into English of Friedrich Schleiermacher's Speeches on Religion. The volume, published in 1893, contained an introduction by Oman which dealt with Schleiermacher's life and times and which was, at that time, perhaps the most adequate estimate of Schleiermacher in English.[1] Oman explained that he refused to give the translation an English accent, but translated it as he believed the author would have done, "had he learned the language of the translation. . . had it been his native tongue."[2] Oman considered his translation exceedingly belated in view of the fact that the Speeches was first published in 1799. He declared:

> It may be questioned whether, after Kant's Critique and Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, any book of the period has had such a great and lasting effect, and it is certainly no question that it foreshadows the problems chiefly discussed among us today as is done by no other book of that time. We have still with us the unity of the Church, the relation of church and state, inspiration, the non-christian religions, the place of religion in life.[3]

Oman said that he felt of all the criticisms which had been made of the Speeches, the most profound was Friedrich Schlegel's verdict that it was a "work of infinite subjectivity." That, according to Oman, was "the ground both of its excellence and its defects."[4] His own conclusion concerning the

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[1]Dickie, op. cit., p. 105.

[2]Oman's introduction to Schleiermacher's Speeches, p. vii.

[3]Ibid., p. x.

[4]Ibid., p. xii.

Speeches was that "it stirs emotions which it does not always satisfy;"[1] nevertheless, he was profoundly influenced by the work. F.R. Tennant commented on this influence, saying:

> Dr. Oman was attracted to this work, and valued it highly, on account of the vigour with which it asserts that religion is an "original" element in human nature, or "implicit in those first intuitions which are the beginning both of our knowledge and of our activity." This line of thought is pursued with originality and adventurousness in his later and largest work, The Natural and the Supernatural.[2]

The first book entirely from Oman's own pen was Vision and Authority, published in 1902, which originated in thoughts and feelings stirred by the Robertson Smith controversy. The author said he "had no thought beyond the more practical issues of the present ecclesiastical situation;"[3] however, the book does not reflect the Robertson Smith case either in form or substance. In the book Oman applied his interpretation of man's freedom to the question facing all theologians at that time—the nature and scope of the Church's authority. The thesis of the work is that the real authority of religion is not to be found in the potentate who sits on the throne of the Caesars, nor in the prelate enthroned at Canterbury, nor in the stern presbyter who rules his Highland glen, but in him who, be he potentate or prelate or presbyter owes his apostolic succession to his

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[1]Oman's introduction to Schleiermacher's Speeches, p.xii.

[2]Tennant, op. cit., p. 334.

[3]Vision and Authority, p. 13.

vision of the kingdom of love. "And the authority of this vision is what alone it will be of profit to restore."[1] James Orr summarized the central message of the book:

> The ultimate authority is the "I have felt"of spiritual intuition and impression. Neither an infallible Church nor an infallible book, but the appeal of truth to a spiritual nature fitted for it as the eye is for light, is the foundation on which religious faith must be built. Mr. Oman neither disparages reason, derides doctrine, undervalues Scripture, nor supposes that Church organisation or institutions can be dispensed with. But his eye is on something more central.[2]

The fact that Vision and Authority was successfully republished with little revision twenty-six years after its first appearance gives evidence of its original quality and value. H. H. Farmer said concerning the second edition that "it is as fresh, inspiring, searching, and relevant as though it had been written yesterday,"[3] while another reviewer wrote that it seemed to be Oman's best book, "not merely because it has the dew of youth, but because it contains the germ of all which he has written."[4]

In The Problem of Faith and Freedom in the Last Two Centuries, which appeared in 1906, Oman maintained that the ultimate problem of at least the last two centuries is "the relation of Faith and Freedom, the

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[1]Vision and Authority, p. 33.

[2]James Orr, "Mr. Oman on Vision and Authority," British Weekly (Vol. XXXII, May 29, 1902), p. 164.

[3]H. H. Farmer, Review of Vision and Authority, British Weekly (Vol. LXXXV, November 29, 1928), p. 194.

[4]A. C. Welch, Review of Vision and Authority, British Weekly (Vol. LXXXV, November 22, 1928), p. 169.

problem of how Faith is to be absolute and Freedom absolute, yet both one."[1] The problem had its rise when the Reformation built in a new way upon the freedom of the Christian man and laid new emphasis upon the importance of this freedom in man's relation to God. As a result of the Reformation, the Church was shorn of her outward glory, but Oman concluded, "as the increase of her outward glory in the Middle Ages heralded her inward corruption, the diminishing of it in our day may set her to the true task of the Kingdom of God."[2] He traced the development of the problem of faith and freedom through its various historical stages, including Jesuitism and Pascal, English Deism and Butler, Rationalism and Kant, Romanticism and Schleiermacher, the French Revolution and Newman, the Theory of Development and Baur, the Theology of Experience and Ritschl. The major thesis of the book, it may be concluded, is that faith and freedom are indispensable to each other, that no man can have a spiritual faith in God who is not absolutely free—free from compulsion, from the legal authority of human institutions and traditions, and that no one can live the life of true freedom except through faith in God who transcends the world, and who allows us to be co-workers with Him in a work which is eternal.

The Church and the Divine Order, published in 1911, was written by Oman because of "the return of a large section of the Church of England

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 4.

[2] Ibid., p. 25.

to the idea of the Church as one continuous external organisation."[1] He considered the various historical manifestations of the Church, beginning with the Jewish preparation and concluding with his present day, and applied the major emphases of his thought on freedom and the spiritual nature of authority to the nature of the Church, its true unity and its task. The book had considerable influence throughout Nonconformity and was hailed as "the first outstanding contribution within the revived Presbyterian Church of England to the doctrine of the Church."[2]

In 1915 The War and Its Issues was released, embodying a discussion of the problem of property and war, the evils of militarism, and principles of a Christian judgment on war. Dr. Oman was convinced that the crux of the question of war was the problem of property, for unless man regards his power and possessions as means of service and not as means for compelling service, he cannot advocate such an attitude nationally. "In order to have power to resist immoral force among the nations, we must not as a people live by the same immoral principle of competition; and if we are to have power to resist it in our society, we must worship another God than material success ourselves."[3] The War and Its Issues,

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[1] John Oman, The Church and the Divine Order (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), p. 290.

[2] John W Grant, Free Churchmanship in England, 1870-1940 (London: Independent Press, Ltd., 1955), p. 221.

[3] War and Its Issues, pp. 67-68.

however, is not merely a scholastic dissertation but it portrays a deep spiritual sensitivity in the author to those unfathomable personal dimensions of a war, such as are revealed here:

> Those of us at least who have known the Germans as generous and warm-hearted friends, and have learned much that deserves our best gratitude from their labours, ought to be able to realise that every death among them, as among ourselves, leaves a blank in some family circle which for some heart will never be filled again while life shall last. Yet in these days we hear with ever diminishing pain that two thousand of them have gone to the bottom or that their casualties are to be numbered in millions. Can a strife which breeds in us such a temper be rightly regarded with anything except detestation and horror?[1]

A series of articles by Oman in The Expositor entitled "Personality and Grace,"[2] formed the groundwork for his Grace and Personality which appeared in 1917. The book deals with God's relation to man, or more specifically, the doctrine of reconciliation; yet, in keeping with the characteristic of wholeness in Oman's theology, the book "sets forth a complete theology which touches on every basic Christian doctrine."[3] From his Calvinistic forebears Oman had inherited the conviction that religious destiny depends absolutely upon the sovereign will of God, while from his study of German philosophy and theology he drew the conviction that Kant correctly postulated the absolute freedom of the human will as a presupposition of all

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[1]The War and Its Issues, p. 19.

[2]The Expositor, loc. cit.

[3]W. E. Hough. "The Message of John Oman," The Baptist Quarterly (Vol. XI, 1942-45), pp. 26-7.

ethical conduct.[1] Therefore, the basic problem of the doctrine of reconciliation, according to Oman, is to relate the dependence upon God, which is an essential quality of a religious person, and the independence of man, which is the essential quality of a moral person. Oman sought to accomplish this union, not by a compromise between religion and morality, nor by the isolation of one from the other, but by an interpretation of reconciliation which recognized that man's absolute religious dependence and his absolute moral dependence are united in the gracious personal relationship in Christian experience.

Some critics accused Grace and Personality of dealing with a "recondite question of philosophical divinity";[2] however, F.R. Tennant called it "one of the greater treasures of theological literature"[3] and George S. Hendry has given Oman the credit for being the first to call for a reinterpretation of grace in Protestant theology. Hendry declared that in Grace and Personality, which appeared first in 1917, "the distinction between the I-thou and the I-it relationship, which was to receive its classical exposition at the hands of Martin Buber six years later, was already drawn and

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[1]Horton, op. cit., pp. 130-31.

[2]J. K. Mozley, Review of Grace and Personality, Journal of Theological Studies (Vol. XXI, April, 1920), p. 349. Cf. Times Literary Supplement (No. 839, February 14, 1918), p. 83.

[3]Tennant, op. cit., p. 333.

applied to theological thinking."[1]

In 1925 Dr. Oman contributed a chapter on "The Sphere of Religion" to a collection of essays entitled Science, Religion and Reality. The essay is significant if for no other reason than to show Oman in collaboration with men of such stature as Arthur S. Eddington, Joseph Needham, Clement C.J. Webb, and William R. Inge. The chapter is also significant in that it anticipated The Natural and the Supernatural which was to appear six years later, for its major emphases are those which Oman treated more thoroughly in the later larger work. He asserted the autonomy of religion and the existence of the supernatural on at least an equal footing with the sciences and concluded that

> it was religion, and not science, which first inspired men to try to unify all their experiences and . . . it is religion still which alone seems to unify all experience—the corporeal and the mental, the inward and the outward, the ideas of value and the facts of existence, the events of time and their significance for eternity.[2]

The Natural and the Supernatural was published in 1931 and is perhaps John Oman's greatest work. H. R. Mackintosh asked "whether there is any other man in Great Britain who could have written a work on religion so profound, so learned, so philosophical in the best sense."[3] Another

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[1]George S. Hendry, The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 127.

[2]John Oman, "The Sphere of Religion," Science, Religion, and Reality, ed., Joseph Needham (London: Sheldon Press, 1926), p. 299.

[3]H. R. Mackintosh, "Principal Oman's Great Work," British Weekly (Vol. 91, October 29, 1931), p. 88.

reviewer termed it "the most distinctive contribution to a philosophy of religion the century has produced."[1] Oman said his work was not a theology, even in the very general sense, but that it was "an attempt to lay a foundation for theology, by considering its method and its problems."[2] The thesis of the book is that man gains his freedom and his power to direct events according to his own purposes by means of religion. The book is, therefore, an attempt to work out a philosophy of religion and to lay the foundations of theological study from the central concept of freedom. Oman's conclusion is that religion, which in essence is right reverence and pursuit of the truly sacred, culminates in the prophetic monotheism, which is reconciliation to all life's appointments. Professor Farmer summarized the central theme of the book by noting that man's

> capacity to apprehend the sacred and to respond (or not to respond) to it in reverent obedience is made the clue to the nature and history of religion, and through this to the understanding of human personality, of evolution, of history, of man's place in and apprehension of the natural order, the whole constituting a mighty argument to justify the contention that to know the reality of the supernatural environment, the prime requisite, as in other spheres, is to be willing to respond to it and to live in its midst with sincerity of mind.[3]

Concerning the Ministry, published in 1936, has been called an

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[1]Review of The Natural and the Supernatural, The Expository Times (Vol. XLIII, February, 1932), p. 203.

[2]Natural and Supernatural, p. 98.

[3]Farmer, "Memoir," p. xxix.

introduction to Oman's philosophical and theological work.[1] It contains lectures on preaching which Oman gave to his students at Cambridge[2] and abounds in practical instruction which gives evidence of its impromptu origin in the classroom. They were "just talks, with freedom to wander into by-paths, and were the last effort of the week, when teacher and taught had had more than enough of serious lecturing."[3] The lectures dealt with the preparation, style and delivery of sermons, while at the same time, Oman kept before his students the fact that their preaching must be vitally connected with their general culture and spiritual life. For instance, he discussed the minister's devotional reading and gave an indication of the reading which had benefited him:

> While I have read with profit such classics as Augustine's Confessions, the Imitation, and Grace Abounding, and even some much more emotional and mystical literature, they constantly seem to miss the human, gracious, calm, objective enterprising religion of Jesus Christ. . . . I find a more natural and spontaneous venture of faith in Luther's Freedom of a Christian Man, John Woolman's Journal, and the Life of Mary Slessor.

Yet Oman concluded that "the parched spirit may more readily go to the poets than to any of them for the water of life."[4]

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[1] John A. Hutton, Review of Concerning the Ministry, British Weekly (Vol. C, April 9, 1936), p. 28.

[2] A series of articles containing chapter summaries and excerpts from Concerning the Ministry appeared immediately prior to the book's publication, in The British Weekly (Vol. XCIX, February 13, 1936), p. 407; (February 20 and 27, March 5, 1936), pp. 427, 447, 467.

[3] Concerning the Ministry, introduction, unnumbered page.

[4] Ibid., p. 28.

Horest Religion was published posthumously in 1941. The book makes no new contribution to Oman's theology but attempts to draw out and present in a simplified form the practical application of his thought. The nature of the book is such that the theological content of the Christian religion is left rather vague; however, "Oman himself becomes very visible in these pages—in the balance of his mind, in his reverent spirit of inquiry, in his caustic humour, in his respect for unscholastic wisdom , in his theological aversions, and in the large tenderness of his nature."[1] Oman explained that the title, Honest Religion,

> sets forth an aspiration after what has no limit or finality, of which the essence is humility towards God and charity towards man, an ideal for all but not an attainment by any, and certainly not by the author. Rather it speaks of what, had I been patient enough I might have found, wise enough I might have valued, humble enough I might have possessed, kind enough I might have used to higher service.[2]

Therefore he sought to discover "what a true response would mean . . . what bearing and attitude would be entire honesty in making life a continual reasoning with God in the sense of laying our minds alongside of His and open to His persuasion."[3] Dr. Leonard Hodgson commends the appropriateness of Oman's emphasis in Honest Religion when he says that

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[1]John Macleod, Review of Honest Religion, Expository Times (Vol. LII, April, 1941), p. 249.

[2]Honest Religion, p. xxxii.

[3]Ibid., p. 1.

the events of the twentieth century have given a salutary check to the optimism of the nineteenth but the reaction to the opposite extreme has gone too far in its denial of progress, and to this situation "Dr. Oman brings a breath of fresh air, a good tonic for war-weary faith."[1]

Throughout the survey of Oman's writings the recurring themes of methodology, religion, freedom, authority, grace and the Church give the main pattern or structure of his theology; consequently, Oman's contribution to theology must be ascertained by an exposition and evaluation of these major themes.

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[1]Leonard Hodgson, Review of Honest Religion, Journal of Theological Studies (Vol. 44, 1943), p. 116.

SECTION II

THE MAJOR THEMES OF OMAN'S THEOLOGY

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCTION: METHODOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCTION: METHODOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Throughout Oman's work there is evidence of his concern for an adequate theological method. When he became Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge, his inaugural address was entitled "Method in Theology," and his great work, The Natural and the Supernatural, was "an attempt to lay a foundation for theology by considering its method and its problems."[1] Some of his other books—Vision and Authority, Grace and Personality, and Honest Religion—often impress one more with the theological method which they reflect and the spirit in which they approach the theological issues than with their actual theological content or conclusions. Oman's theology has been described by Professor Farmer as a theology of "reverence, freedom and sincerity,"[2] and it is significant that these major characteristics are methodological in nature.

Although Oman's thought is quite clearly within the context of "traditional Christianity," he believed that theology works necessarily on the frontiers of intuition and anticipation; consequently, his methodology

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[1] John Oman, The Natural and the Supernatural (Cambridge: University Press, 1931), pp. 98.

[2] Farmer's "Memoir" in Honest Religion, p. xxviii.

is that of philosophical theology rather than "kerygmatic" theology.[1] His methodology in essence is that "no other method than surveying our environment from the highest standpoint we can reach, with all our experience and all our insight as well as knowledge" can be applied profitably to the study of theology.[2] He believed that in religion one must be as "bold, as free, as honest, as prepared to face all realities as in science or philosophy. Slavery to tradition, fear of inquiry, submission to institution, are not religion but the want of it, not faith but unbelief."[3]

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[1]This distinction is made by Tillich in Systematic Theology, Volume I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 4.

[2]Natural and Supernatural, p. 99.

The wideness or breadth of outlook in A.N. Whitehead appealed to Oman in his later years as he became acquainted with Whitehead's thought, and the following passage illustrates their affinity at least in this area of methodology:

> "There is no other thinker at present who interests me as much as Mr. Whitehead, and yet I do not find it easy to say why. . . . There is no one among us who is doing quite as much to create a truer, freer, more reverent, more gracious view of the universe: and the only explanation I can give is that this belongs more to the man with his wide, sincere, and independent interests, than to anything he has yet achieved in theory. We might sum it up as the humility of the really wise man before the depth and wonder of the universe, which makes him a power for an entire change of outlook."

John Oman, Review of Alfred North Whitehead's Religion in the Making, Journal of Theological Studies (Vol. XXVIII, 1927), pp. 296-97.

[3]Honest Religion, p. 51. This quality was recognized in Oman by his contemporaries. One wrote: "He has 'sat down before facts as a little child,' been prepared to give up every preconceived notion, and follow humbly wherever truth may lead. And it has led him to Christ."

"The New Principal, An Appreciation," loc. cit.

Oman set forth his own method by showing its relation to the method of rationalism, for he believed that the movement variously called rationalism, the age of reason, the illumination or Aufklärung, illustrated both what is right and what is wrong in theological method. He felt the task of relating his own method to that of rationalism was particularly necessary because the latter was grounded on a right principle which had to be maintained even when the particular application of it was rejected. The contribution which rationalism made to methodology was, according to Oman, its affirmation that truth is not truth for us except as we ourselves see it, and that right is not righteous for us except as we determine it. Hence man's highest and most personal concern is to determine his own beliefs by his own reason, and his own duty by his own conscience. This affirmation of rationalism established the authority of the witness of reality to itself and made it man's duty to defer to it alone and not to any external authorities.[1] Oman believed that rationalism had stated this principle far too negatively and he attempted to emphasize the positive principle involved by declaring that "the witness of reality will not deceive us if we approach it with the right questions and if, in sincerity, we spare no pains to understand its answers."[2]

Oman, therefore, suggested the following principles as necessary

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 100.

[2] Ibid.

for an adequate theological method. These principles belong to all inquiries into the nature of any kind of experience, and they must be accepted by theology if it is to be a convincing pursuit:

> (1) Religion, like all else that claims to deal with a real world, must submit to open investigation. It is of the nature of all reality to challenge investigation: and fear of investigation can only arise from doubt about the reality.
>
> (2) A right investigation seeks to know only what exists, so as to have a full awareness of it, and, as far as possible, an understanding of it, and we may not set any limit to the inquiry.
>
> (3) We have at least as much right to assume that man's mind is made in the image of the Supernatural as in the image of the Natural, and that, rightly used, it is in this sphere, at least as much as in the sphere of the Natural, the measure of the universe.
>
> (4) True humility is not submission to human authority, but total disregard of it when the reality speaks to us. And this must be at least as true of the Supernatural as of the Natural. Here too the only objective authority is the authority of the object.[1]

Oman maintained that religion, as nothing else, sets a man alone, and recognition of this as a final and decisive fact, is the "watershed" of all thinking, especially of religious thinking. To illustrate this he compared the method of science to that of religion, saying that although science is concerned with truth, no one has a scientific mind until he is free from scientific fashion and can treat the great scientists simply as his teachers. Only when a scientist can acknowledge no ultimate authority except the witness of reality to his own mind has he achieved a really scientific mind. Religion, Oman

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 101.

explained, is equally concerned with universal truth, and in this sphere "no one is strictly a religious person till he has realized the utter loneliness of his spirit and desires to hear nothing but what speaks in this aloneness, and no deliverance from it except harmony with the reality of this sacred world which sets him in this isolation."[1]

While Oman deemed rationalism right in insisting on the necessity of receiving truth on the basis of insight rather than authority, he believed that rationalism had failed in being so concerned with the form of freedom that it was indifferent to its content. The rationalists merely insisted on being independent, believing only what was forced on them by logical argument, and doing only what was imposed on them by rationalized imperatives. It seemed to Oman that if these requirements were observed, the rationalists did not care how much man missed of truth and righteousness. In other words, rationalism had made man a much poorer measure of the universe than he actually is. While recognizing that man's knowledge is the only measure he has, the rationalists had failed to remember that man uses his knowing profitably only when he realizes how completely the universe is beyond his measuring. Oman strongly maintained, therefore, that the rationalists' insistence on the form of freedom could never replace a positive faith in a witness of reality and man's duty to lay himself open to it. From this particular lack came rationalism's failure to provide a right method for any study,

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[1]Natural and Supernatural, p. 102.

and especially for theology.

The basic weaknesses of rationalism's method were summarized by Oman in the following way:

(1) Rationalism did not ask what the Natural or the Supernatural were, but "imposed on the former the conclusions of its science and on the latter the conclusions of its theology." It thereby reduced religion to mere intellectual doctrines about God, providence and immortality.

(2) Rationalism reduced all truth to what could be proved by abstract reasoning, and did not seek understanding by full awareness. Instead of realizing that each kind of reality had its own witness which must determine the method of inquiry, rationalism determined first the method and then limited its inquiry to what could thereby be included.

(3) Rationalism did not assume that man's mind is made in the image of the Supernatural, but rather regarded nothing in man's mind except the understanding. The rationalists assumed something like a Cartesian idea of a perfect being. But when they "tried to get truth out of the mere notion of abstract universality, and goodness out of abstract laws, and beauty out of abstract utility, mind was conceived neither in the image of the Natural nor of the Supernatural."[1]

(4) Rationalism failed, also, to develop the realization of man's smallness in contrast to the greatness of the universe . On the contrary,

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[1]Natural and Supernatural, p. 103.

it assumed man's greatness and thus made the universe small. It was this lack of humility which was possibly at the root of all these limitations of rationalism.[1]

The sharp contrast between the method of rationalism and Oman's own approach is revealed in the basic principle of his methodology, which insists that each kind of reality has its own kind of witness and the reality must determine its own kind of method. The chief requirement, therefore, is that one have an open mind to learn as he goes on his way. It is evident, however, that the witness of a sphere which is mainly concerned with what ought to be cannot be the same as that of a sphere which is wholly concerned with what is. Therefore, one has not only to consider its facts in the light of all the aspects of reality which he cannot escape, but one also has

> to be aware, to the utmost limit of intuition and anticipation, of the whole reality. If this is a higher reality, which is seeking to reveal itself through our whole experience in this present world, it requires us to reach out after our farthest vision and follow even the dimly discerned beckoning of its requirements, as they speak to us of what is beyond demonstration and only discerned in moments of deeper insight and higher consecration. It thus deals with life's supreme business of progress: and this is its justification.[2]

Since Oman's methodology insisted on man's responding to his environment in its widest possible context, this naturally involves the question of how one knows his environment. It is therefore necessary to deal briefly with

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[1]Natural and Supernatural, pp. 103-04.

[2]Ibid., p. 109.

Oman's theory of knowledge as a background for his theology.

Broadly speaking, in epistemology, Oman is a realist, accepting environment as it presents itself in its own terms; however, he is in the idealistic tradition with regard to his emphasis on meaning and purpose. He stands in the English tradition of personalistic theism which can be generally traced to Kantian sources; however, his epistemology is distinct from the absolute idealism of Bradley and Bosanquet.[1]

The essential elements of Oman's epistemology are found in the following emphases: (1) awareness and apprehension as ways of knowing; (2) an ordered universe which is interpreted symbolically as meaning; (3) the reality of natural and ideal values and their relation to religion; (4) the absolute necessity of the feeling of sincerity for true knowledge of the environment. Each of these elements will be considered briefly.

Oman distinguished four types of knowing, which he termed awareness, apprehension, comprehension and explanation. It is necessary to quote somewhat at length to show his distinction among these types of knowing. He explained:

> While walking in a dreamy mood along a country road, we may have a vivid sense of all that is about us, without attending to anything in particular. Our knowing is then a general field of awareness, including scent and sound as well as sight. The more we are entirely in this state of pure awareness, the more all our senses are active, so that we may even have vague realisation of

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[1]Apparently there is no direct link with American Personalism.

> the taste of the apples in the orchards and the coolness of the waters in the streams.
>
> Something in this field arouses particular attention, say an object moving toward us on the road. If it specially interests us, as, for example, by being unfamiliar, we concentrate attention on it to see exactly what it is, seeking to apprehend it as one object by what appears to be its more relevant and important details. Let us say that we apprehend it to be a man riding a bicycle.
>
> Then, supposing we have none of the information we afterward learn to include under the name bicycle, but have everything to learn about it, we try, as it approaches, to comprehend it.
>
> This we do by considering the machine in relation to the man as a means of locomotion: and we think we comprehend it when we understand how it is the means for gaining this end.
>
> Finally, as it passes, we are faced by the problem that it seems to have no support from its breadth, yet keeps upright while travelling along a line. This singularity we must try to explain: and we do it with such general principles as the scientific knowledge we happen to possess provides.[1]

This theory might then be summarized by saying that awareness is knowing the environment in its wholeness and unity. Apprehension picks out individual objects by interest and attention, yet never removes them from their place in the whole world of awareness. But comprehension and explanation are concerned with understanding the environment already perceived. Comprehension is concerned with how a thing fulfills its particular purpose, and explanation with reducing this comprehension to an abstract principle applicable to all objects of the same sort. Oman's emphasis fell clearly on the value of awareness and apprehension as ways of knowing, for he believed that apart from these means there was "no other source of

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, pp. 120-21.

concrete knowing."[1]

The question of knowledge, however, involves the world which makes itself known and not just the way of knowing, because both the knower and the way of knowing can develop only in relation to what there is to be known. Oman therefore maintained that if one is to understand the nature of his environment he must look not only to the scientist and philosopher, who are primarily looking for an explanation and understanding, but also to the experience of the poet and the child whose gifts are for perceiving rather than explaining. While Oman did not relinquish the insights of rationalism which he had appropriated in his methodology, his sympathies in epistemology were more clearly with romanticism's interest in the varied world of individuality. For he said that one will be nearer to understanding the nature of his environment "by dealing with the world of concrete realities of infinitely varied interest and value of the poet, than with even the best and truest abstract cosmological principle of the philosopher."[2]

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 121.
Canon Charles Raven declared:

> All knowledge has, indeed, followed this path from awareness to explanation; and at each stage of the journey the scope of our experience is narrowed, attention is restricted and concentrated, and what begins as an activity of the whole self in relation to its whole environment becomes, when analysis is complete, a minute and abstract interpretation of one aspect of one particular unit selected from the whole.

Charles Raven, Natural Religion and Christian Theology (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), (Second Series entitled: Experience and Interpretation), p. 49.

[2] Natural and Supernatural, p. 125.

The foundation upon which Oman based his epistemology was his belief in an ordered universe which could be interpreted symbolically as meaning. Although this aspect of Oman's epistemology is sometimes vague because he failed to define clearly his use of the term "meaning," his emphasis is usually clear and helpful in understanding how one knows his environment. He illustrated this concept by referring to the development of language. Language was originally very close to apprehension and was possible because there was a common and fixed order of experience which was apprehended by those who would communicate with one another. Man has, by language, extended his knowledge beyond the range of his own senses and has gained knowledge of times remote from his own experience. Man, "by making his experience a universe of discourse with his fellows, has come to a conscious knowledge that it deals with an actual universe which is rational and ordered."[1] Along this same line of thought Oman observed that a person listening to the playing of a violin perhaps knows that there is an ordered system of vibrations, and that the player creates the vibrations in accord with his melody. Yet the listener is not really conscious of this, but is only aware of pleasing sounds corresponding to the vibrations. When the listener becomes really rapt in the music he ceases to be conscious even of the pleasure of the sounds and is conscious only of the melodious meaning of the music. Oman thus concluded:

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 170.

> If all perceiving be of this nature, at the frontier of the individual there is a system of symbols of vibration without and a corresponding system of sensations interpreting them within, and the significance of the individual frontier is that knowledge can pass it only as our meaning. Thus knowing is not knowledge as an effect of an unknown external cause, but is knowledge as we so interpret that our meaning is the actual meaning of our environment.[1]

If man's environment is an ordered universe which may be interpreted by meaning, then sensation must be explained by meaning and not as the creator of meaning. Oman again referred to the development of language. Every language, he said, has been developed by attending to the meaning rather than the process of speaking. When a man speaks he does not think of the way sounds are produced or the symbols used in various languages. Rather, he thinks of expressing meaning. In the same manner, perception has come by interest in what is to be perceived and not by thinking about the senses and the apparatus of perception.[2] Oman thus declared:

> The important aspect of sensations which determines all development in the use of them is that they are symbols of meaning in a field which has one meaning, and it does not concern any question of their physical or physiological basis, because even this basis depends on meaning, and not meaning on it.[3]

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 175.

[2] This same emphasis on interest is seen in Ritschl's epistemology for he declared "without interest we do not trouble ourselves about anything." Albrecht Ritschl, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation (trans. H.R. Mackintosh and A.B. Macaulay). (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), p. 204.

[3] Natural and Supernatural, p. 191.

Oman concluded, then, that sensations must be explained in terms of meaning and quality rather than mechanism and quantity. Sensations are, of course, responses to physical stimuli; however, it is important to understand that sensations are of a different quality than physical stimuli and pass the frontier of man's mind as meaning. Sensations may have a direct relation to their object, but the deeper reason for their meaning is that they are in a system of meaning and are determined by an interest which governs their whole activity and makes them effective as response and not simply as subjective feeling.[1]

Another significant emphasis in Oman's epistemology was his treatment of the reality of natural and ideal values and their relation to religion. He reasoned that

> if our knowledge is knowledge only as we establish securely the frontier of our minds and allow nothing to pass except as our meaning, and if knowledge is right meaning in our minds by active interpretation of a meaning that is the true reality, much judgement is embedded in all our knowing.[2]

Therefore, an essential question which all our knowing raises is whether a value-judgement is merely an individual preference or whether it is concerned with objective reality. Oman affirmed that there are natural values without which there is no normal relation to the world and these values are guaranteed because if they were wrongly fixed, the species would no longer survive.

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, pp. 198-99.

[2] Ibid., p. 201.

Although Oman distinguished between the natural values by which man knows his normal relation to the world and the ideal values of truth, beauty, and goodness, he believed that there was really no break in principle between them. The dimmest discernment of the material world has the world of the higher senses waiting to be unfolded in it and no discernment could have existed had this not been the case. So with man's first rude beginnings of his knowledge of the higher world he enters into the realm of the true, the beautiful and the good. Oman concluded:

> Though all perception concerns meaning, and therefore the reality of natural values, the reasonableness of the world has to do with ideal values, which we speak of as the true, the beautiful and the good. If faith is what we act on, no one ever really convinced himself that they are the mere opinions of a certain smooth-skinned biped, and of no significance for the constitution of the universe. The moment we begin to live in the world as a rational universe, we assume their validity.[1]

The ideal values according to Oman, are integrally related to religion and even have a religious quality themselves in certain respects. They are all free in the sense that their sacredness gives man a right to stand on his own feet in their strength alone. They are all of infinite reverence in the sense that their end is to discern what may have no limits of possibility and they are all supernatural in the sense that loyalty to them is concerned with a worth beyond all merely natural values. Religion is related to these ideals in that it gives independent courage and sacredness

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 206.

of personal responsibility for seeing one's whole environment and by living in what is highest in it and seeing what it promises. This principle, expressed scientifically, means "that reality is its own sole witness and may not call any other into court"; expressed religiously, it is "I will hear only what God the Lord will speak."[1] Oman has developed this concept more fully in his treatment of authority, and his stress upon the internal authority in religion is quite consistent with this aspect of his epistemology.[2]

The inseparable relation between Oman's epistemology and his method may be seen in his insistence on the attitude of reverence and sincerity of feeling if man is to have a true knowledge of his environment. In an emphasis which reflects the influence of Schleiermacher and which Oman developed more fully in his interpretation of religion, he maintained that nothing reveals itself to a man unless he has the right attitude toward it. This attitude involves right feeling, which means sensitive, sincere, and objective feeling, even more than right acting or thinking. One can neither be argued nor drilled into reverence and sincerity, but must be educated into it by the whole of life. He therefore concluded:

> True sincerity means having neither hard Stoicism, especially towards others, nor false sentimentality, especially towards ourselves. Lack of it is not concerned merely with ourselves and other persons. It goes to the root of our whole

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 208.

[2] See Chapter on Authority.

> perception of what is true and great in all our environment, natural and supernatural, being the essential and creative sincerity by which our knowing is wholly concerned with knowledge.[1]

The relation of Oman's methodology and epistemology to the more constructive aspects of his theology will be illustrated in later chapters and it is not necessary to prolong this introduction by examples of this relation or by lengthy criticisms. There are, however, several important questions which it will be helpful to raise at this point in order to provide an orientation for evaluating Oman's contribution to theology.

To begin with, it should be asked whether Oman's theology is entirely free from the criticism which he aimed at rationalism's method: namely, that it was so concerned with the form of freedom that it neglected its content. Oman made a valuable contribution to theology by insisting on man's individual acceptance of truth by his own insight, but in certain aspects of his thought, such as his interpretation of authority, he appeared to be more concerned with the form of freedom in which man accepts truth presented to him than with the content or substance of the truth which has been presented. It might be maintained that Oman's method of approaching certain theological doctrines—such as authority, grace and the Church—in an attitude of reverence, freedom, sincerity and honesty, constituted an even greater contribution to theology than did his interpretation of the content of these doctrines.

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 212.

Another question which has a profound effect upon the fuller discussion of Oman's theological themes is this: Just how capable is man, in his condition of sin, of responding to his environment in sincerity of feeling? It is regrettable that Oman never attempted to give a very thorough treatment of sin and its effect on man's capacity to know God or his environment. Still another question which should be considered concerns the nature of man's environment which is to be interpreted. Oman was surely correct in his emphasis on the necessity of man's starting in the widest context of his environment, but did he stress the personal nature of this environment to the extent that the personalism of his theology seems to demand? Professor Farmer has said:

> Oman's own principle that in interpreting the Supernatural and its relation to us we should start from the highest that we know might well seem to require that the sense in which God and His approach to men are said to be truly personal should have been more deeply analyzed and put more fully in control of the argument from the beginning.[1]

Further, it seems that God's revelation to man, as distinct from man's own perception of his spiritual nature and environment has not been given sufficient emphasis in Oman's thought. These and other criticisms, however, may be more carefully analyzed and evaluated when Oman's other major theological themes are considered in the following chapters.

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[1] H. H. Farmer, Revelation and Religion (London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1954), p. 28.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGION

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Oman's interpretation of religion is basically a methodological study of the principles which he believed should be considered in any inquiry into the nature and meaning of religion. Although he never really defined the pattern of his interpretation in these words, his purpose may be described in the following way: he sought to combine Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence in religion, which he interpreted as intuitive awareness, with Ritschl's emphasis on the place of value in religious experience. Consequently, he sought to interpret religion as essentially the means by which one intuitively encounters and evaluates his environment, both Natural and Supernatural, in meaningful and victorious experience. He attempted to follow the principles of his theological method by approaching the origin and nature of religion with an extremely broad survey of (1) the preliminary problems to the study of religion, (2) the principles of interpreting the religious environment, (3) and a classification of religions. It is regrettable that in his concern for breadth and comprehensiveness in his approach, he interpreted religion primarily as a concern for an environment which is not very clearly personal. His interpretation remained therefore a comparative study of the basic affinities of world religions, with very little attempt made to correlate and evaluate religion in the light of Biblical revelation and, more particularly, in

the light of its highest manifestation in Jesus Christ.

The preliminary problems which Oman considered in his interpretation of religion were: the relation of interest to the study of religion, the fact that there can be good and bad religion, religion as an objective reality, religion as illusion, religion and the historical method, religion and anthropology. In considering the objection that for one to have an interest in religion was to disqualify him for its proper study, Oman noted that in all other areas of study, an interest in the subject is considered an advantage, but some seem to feel that religion is of such nature that genuine interest in it makes a valid interpretation impossible. Oman answered that an adequate study of religion must involve a sincere interest in the truth which it contains. He reasoned that if the Supernatural does really exist as our environment, men should be profoundly interested in it; and where interest is not present, there can be no adequate interpretation.

Oman believed that for one to understand the essential nature of religion, he must recognize its ambivalent character. There must be an attempt to distinguish what rightly belongs to religion from that which has been incorporated into it by human nature. This is not to say that Oman would have excluded from the study of religion the various aberrations which claim to be religion, for he advocated including these phenomena; however, he did recognize that there can be bad religion just as there can be bad business or bad morality. To overlook this fact is to be unrealistic in the study of religion, for many things which are called religion are not

commendable. There must, therefore, be an ideal standard or norm of what belongs properly and essentially to religion, and even the way men misinterpret and abuse religion may give some indication of its true nature.

Following Schleiermacher's emphasis on religion as an original element in man's nature, which he believed to be Schleiermacher's greatest contribution in The Speeches, Oman insisted that religion is not merely a creation of a mental state or a social phenomenon, nor is it a result of theology. Religion is primarily concerned with the ultimate question of the actual existence and nature of our Supernatural environment, rather than with any subjective experience which the Supernatural may create. He declared that religion is

> an affirmation of what we may call broadly the Supernatural, and that its quality is determined by this outward reference and not by any particular kind of subjective feeling or attitude, while its validity wholly depends on whether such an invisible world exists or not.[1]

Oman found support and illustration for his interpretation of the nature of religion in Kant, Schleiermacher and Hegel in that their theories of religion were basically metaphysical and not psychological. Although they disagree about the way ultimate reality reveals itself to the soul, and even though Kant interprets ultimate reality as the moral order, Schleiermacher as artistic harmony in the universe, and Hegel as the cosmic process of reason, they all agree, according to Oman, that this ultimate reality

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 23.

makes an absolute claim on man. They are also agreed that the acknowledgement of this claim is the very essence of religion and that religion is that which gives victory in the midst of the change and uncertainty of human experience.[1] It is impossible to say here whether Oman has been influenced by these three thinkers on this point, or whether he just used their particular agreement to illustrate his own position; nevertheless, it is this emphasis which he developed more fully in his interpretation of religion as redemption from the evanescent.

Another preliminary question which Oman felt it necessary to consider was the interpretation of religion as illusion.[2] He broadly described the theores of religion as illusion as those which interpret religion as an outgrowth of aberration, delusion and self-interest and which overlook the possibility that ultimate reality can make creative contact with man in an environment of freedom. Oman agreed with Ritschl that religion begins when personal things are distinguished in value from extended things, and that religion is continually seeking to establish the value and transcendence of the personal over the mechanical or natural; therefore, no psychological

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 28. H. H. Farmer has developed this emphasis of absolute claim and has related it more directly than Oman ever did to the Christian religion. Cf. Revelation and Religion, p. 65, and H. H. Farmer, The World and God (London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1936), p. 23, 27.

[2] Oman classified these theories as (a) Hegelian or intellectualist type: Comte, A.F. Crawley, de la Grasserie; (b) Schleiermacherian type: Feuerback; (c) Kantian type: Leuba, Durkheim. See Natural and Supernatural, p. 29ff.

theory invalidates Ritschl's conclusion that "if this victory is possible, it can only be because there is a reality in the world and above it akin to the personal."[1] The heart of Oman's objection to the theories of religion as illusion lies in his argument that psychology approaches everything from within the mind and can only say that some things seem to exist externally to the mind. Oman insisted that the truth and reality of religion could only be determined by dealing with the Supernatural as the real environment and considering the evidence for its validity. Moreover, he reasoned that if the objective nature of religion could be determined as illusion on merely psychological grounds—that is, by an analysis and description of the way the mind works—then there is no possibility of objective knowledge in any sphere. These considerations on the theories of religion as illusion confirmed Oman's conviction that the basic question of religion is the nature and quality of the natural and supernatural environment.

> Religion is a concern with a special kind of environment, in the same way as any other experience, which is to say, by dealing with it and not merely by arguing about it. If it is real, we can think about it and even argue within it, as well as order our actions in respect of it, and the more successful we are, the more it will approve itself to us in one experience which is in one universe of discourse. No kind of thinking ever reveals any kind of reality, yet no experience comes without an active dealing with it in thought and action. It comes as meaning, not as impact; and meaning is value; and value in the end depends upon feeling; yet it is not upon mere feeling, but upon right thinking and acting in relation to it.[2]

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 41. Cf. Ritschl, op. cit., p. 228f.

[2] Natural and Supernatural, pp. 53-54.

The thing which distorts religion, Oman once said, is not a preoccupation with one phase of it, such as the intellectual or emotional, as is so often believed, but an absence of all reality.

> The genuinely pious man, and the ardent seeker after truth, and the prophetic labourer for the kingdom of God are all religious men who cannot pursue their ends too intensely or too far. Religion is corrupted not because men are not sufficiently encyclopaedic, but because they are not sufficiently single-minded.[1]

Oman also refused to allow the question of the origin of religion to be determined merely by the historical method . He maintained that it is impossible in historical research to penetrate before the time when man responded to his environment with a feeling that was somehow indefinably greater than fear. Man has always acknowledged obligations and claims upon his life which contradict or surpass his senses, and he has also always testified to an awareness of an environment which transcends the mere physical level of experience. Oman did admit that if the origin of religion be treated as a descriptive record of its early appearances, rather than as an explanation of its rise in man's experience, then surely the beginning of religion is a legitimate historical concern. He insisted, however, that the historical method could not possibly explain the original emergence of religion, and any historical interpretation which claims to do this has failed to recognize its own limitations and has imposed

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[1] John Oman, Review of George Galloway's Principles of Religious Development, Journal of Theological Studies (Vol. XI, July, 1910), pp.595-96.

psychological conclusions upon its method.[1]

Furthermore, he maintained that it was impossible for the nature of religion to be explained merely by the results of anthropological studies or the findings of the study of primitive religion. Rather, he believed that an understanding of the nature of religion is necessary in order for one to know how to select and interpret the significant facts concerning religion. Accordingly, he concluded:

> If we do not know already what religion is, we can no more hope to reconstruct a living religion out of a mere welter of facts than if we had never seen a tree to reconstruct it out of sawdust. If religion is an actual experience of an actual environment, we can only hope for an answer as to what that environment is by asking with all our knowledge and capacity how it environs us.[2]

By thus admitting the impossibility of a completely objective approach to the study of religion, Oman is not only honest about the assumptions and convictions which he brings to his study, but he also illustrates the necessity for a theological norm of interpretation. Although he did not accomplish this intention along the lines of a Christian theological standard as fully as might be desired, he does provide helpful commentary on the limitations of a mere historical and comparative analysis of the phenomena of religion.

In a way quite consistent with his epistemology, Oman maintained that man knows his environment not merely as physical impact, but as he

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 56.

[2] Ibid., p. 57.

interprets its meaning. Although he did not really define his use of the word "meaning" he did explain that the meaning by which we know all our environment depends on four principles: (1) the unique quality of the feeling it produces; (2) its unique value for man; (3) the conviction of its objective reality which cannot be separated from man's evaluation of it; (4) the necessity of interpreting it in the whole of one's experience. These principles are inseparably related to one another in all of man's experience of his environment and each one is interdependent on the others. For example: feeling and value depend on one another; the conviction of the objective reality depends upon a proper evaluation; and a proper evaluation depends on a right conviction about reality; and even the necessity of interpreting in wholeness is a part of our receiving our environment properly, and interpreting in wholeness is dependent on our conviction concerning its reality. These principles are involved in all our experience, whether physical or spiritual, but "what distinguishes religion from all else is the unique quality of the feeling, of the valuation, of the nature of the object, and of the way of thinking things together."[1]

In relating these principles of environment to religion, Oman realized that he was distinguishing between elements which could not be divided. Yet he attempted to show that there is in religion:

(1) a reflexion of it in a feeling of its own special quality;
(2) an immediate judgement of worth of a kind different from

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[1]Natural and Supernatural, p. 58.

> all others; (3) a conviction of a peculiar kind of reality; and (4) a special way of thinking it all together as one experience.[1]

Oman summarized the most significant characteristics of his interpretation of religion by relating these principles of environment to the carefully defined terms, holy, sacred, Supernatural, and theology.

> The 'holy' I propose to use for the direct sense or feeling of the Supernatural, and the 'sacred' for its valuation as of absolute worth. The special object I shall call 'the Supernatural,' and the thinking together 'theology'. . . . By the sacred, in particular, all religion is distinguished, and all religious thinking is right thinking only as it is about what is truly sacred. The Supernatural is not a further inference from it as from effects to a cause, but is felt and valued in it; and, when separated from this manifestation, it is without content and deprived of all reality, because it no longer deals with an environment, but is mere abstract argument about the universe.[2]

In his interpretation of the unique feeling which is created by the Supernatural environment, Oman made a very significant distinction between the holy and the sacred. In doing so he compared his position with that of Rudolf Otto in The Idea of the Holy.[3] Oman said that according to Otto, the awesome holy, or the mysterium tremendum et fascinans, is the one basic religious feeling. Although Oman did agree that the mysterium

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 58.

[2] Ibid., p. 59.

[3] Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (trans. John W. Harvey), Oxford: University Press, 1923).

Oman wrote an extensive review of The Idea of the Holy in The Journal of Theological Studies (Vol. XXVI, April, 1925), pp. 275-86, when the book first appeared in English. The essential arguments of this review were later incorporated into the Natural and Supernatural, and it is this fuller treatment which is followed in the discussion above.

tremendum et fascinans was probably experienced more often in religious contexts, he felt that this feeling should not be limited exclusively to religious experience. He wondered whether this feeling were not present in many of man's experiences which had no special religious significance, such as man's conquest of nature, and he even raised the question whether or not animals could have this experience of the awesome Holy as Otto had interpreted it. Oman reasoned that if the experience of the holy were feeling alone, then it could scracely be distinguished from such feelings as the eerie or grotesque on the one hand, or the aesthetic feeling of the sublime on the other, but if the feeling of the holy is related to an absolute evaluation of the holy as sacred, then this feeling of awe is quite different in quality from dread and even loftier than a sense of the sublime.

Oman further disagreed with Otto's interpretation of the holy because Otto insisted that the awesome holy was the basic religious feeling even though he taught that it was totally lacking in any ethical qualities. Otto sharply divided the awesome holy from its ethical nature, but maintained that experience and common sense demand that somehow the two are connected a priori.[1] Oman rejected this artificial distinction in Otto's theory because he believed it contained a false methodological assumption and he pointed out that two entirely distinct developments had never been

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[1]Otto, op. cit., pp. 136f.

known to be united *a priori*. He maintained, rather, that throughout the development of the sense of the holy there have always been present, and to some degree observable, the rudiments of moral characteristics.[1] Oman's desire to correlate the awesome and ethical counterparts in the idea of the holy is a commendable example of his effort to unite in the wholeness of interpretation that which is really one in religious experience. It might also be pointed out that it was probably Oman's insight on this theme which provided the basic theological orientation for Dr. Farmer's later criticism that Otto had made his interpretative net

> of far too wide mesh to catch and isolate the essential fact of religion. Not all awareness of '*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*' is religious; it is religious when the '*mysterium tremendum*' takes on the quality of unconditional value resistance, and the 'fascinans' takes on the quality of uniting man, in and through that resistance, to a final security and well-being.[2]

The second principle of the religious environment which Oman had distinguished was "an immediate judgement of worth of a kind different from all others." Oman placed the emphasis here on the actual act of judgement and the quality of the evaluating itself, rather than on the reality which is being judged. He amplified this principle in his interpretation of the word sacred, by which he meant that which is absolute in value and incomparable in worth, that which is not merely supreme but incapable of being compared with other things. He declared that everything which is given the value of

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[1] *Natural and Supernatural*, p. 63.

[2] Farmer, *The World and God*, p. 65.

the sacred belongs in the realm of religion, and conversely everything that is in the realm of religion, in this sense, should be valued as sacred. For example, doctrines are only propositional statements if they do not deal with realities that are judged to be sacred; and religious practices are only social in nature if they are not supported by the conviction that they enable one to worship a power which is believed to be sacred; and even the idea of God may become a philosophical principle if this concept does not represent and include all that man considers sacred. In other words, the feeling of awe and reverence which one has toward his environment must also include an appreciation of its value and worth as sacred before this feeling may properly be called religious. Oman called that reality which possesses the quality of absolute value the Supernatural and declared that the most distinguishing characteristic of the sphere of religion is its primary concern with the sacred.

Oman reasoned that one has not completed the task of finding the sphere of religion when he has described the unique feeling of the holy and interpreted the value of the sacred. The sphere of religion does not consist of the feeling or the evaluation, or their combination, but rather, in the words of his third principle of the religious environment, it consists of "a conviction of a peculiar kind of reality" or in other words, the existence of the Supernatural. Oman approached the question of the existence of the Supernatural in a very simple experiential manner when he affirmed that

man lives in the midst of Supernatural reality even as he lives in the context of the Natural world, and man is not primarily occupied with the problem of how he knows that these realms do really exist; nevertheless, Oman explained, the manner of knowing the Supernatural and the Natural is an all-important factor in determining their existence and worth. The Natural is known by sense impressions as those are interpreted meaningfully to have relative value, while the Supernatural is known by the awareness of the holy which it creates and which is judged to be sacred and of absolute value. The Supernatural is therefore that reality which has absolute value and is, strictly speaking, incomparable; consequently, it is the unique province of interest for religion.

Oman warned that even though the Supernatural can be distinguished from the Natural by the fact that it reveals higher values, there should not be an easy and superficial division drawn between the Natural and the Supernatural. It is not possible to speak as though the Natural were a deterministic realm and the Supernatural an order of freedom, because the Natural possesses a quality of freedom and the Supernatural contains an element of necessity; neither may the distinction be made by calling the Natural the normal, and the Supernatural the miraculous, because the Natural is often quite miraculous, and the Supernatural the ordinary quality of every day life. The Natural and the Supernatural are so interrelated and interdependent that they cannot be rigidly contrasted or ever totally isolated

from one another; rather, they form an organic whole as the environment for the development of man's freedom and the discovery of God's purpose. Oman is to be commended for realizing that an adequate view of religion is theologically dependent upon an interpretation of the Natural which will at least admit the ontological continuity between the Natural and the Supernatural to the extent that revelation has the possibility of entering and becoming a part of the Natural world. If the Natural does not in some way reveal, or at least possess the capacities for receiving the Supernatural, it is difficult to have any understanding of the way in which God reveals himself in a historical manifestation such as Israel and the Incarnation. Oman may have failed to follow through with an adequate interpretation of the discontinuity of revelation which the Incarnation of Christ involves but the ontological continuity between the Natural and the Supernatural as a revelational threshold has been adequately prepared.

Oman drew a metaphysical conclusion when he affirmed the validity of the existence of the Supernatural, but he stayed near to his existential approach when he refused to follow a speculative method in arriving at this position. He was content to base his claim for the existence of the Supernatural upon that immediate conviction of moral reality which the Supernatural produces in experience.

> We know the Supernatural as it reflects itself in the sense of the holy and has for us absolute value directly and without further argument: and the question is not that it exists, but how it exists in its relation to us and our relation to it. We

> can make no more out of arguing abstractly about it than we should out of arguing abstractly, as men long did, about the Natural.[1]

Oman therefore concluded his emphasis on the Supernatural by declaring that man's greatest responsibility is "to discover the true Supernatural, and this means again to exercise the true sense of the holy and have the right judgement of the sacred."[2]

The final principle of interpreting the religious environment is what Oman called "thinking it all together as one experience" and he assigned this responsibility to theology. Oman had a Ritschlian concern that theology should never be dependent on metaphysics.[3] He maintained that the knowledge of the reality of the Supernatural cannot be produced by a metaphysical extension of human reasoning from man's experience of the holy and the sacred in the natural world, for when this is attempted the result is an arrid theology which is unrelated to the reality of the Natural and Supernatural environment in which man lives. The real source of religious knowledge is not to be found in metaphysics or even in theology but rather in the environment. Theology and religion can never be identified, for theology is an interpretation of reality which must seek to understand

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 72.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Church and Divine Order, p. 322. Cf. Ritschl, Justification and Reconciliation, p. 16, 222, 237.

the Supernatural in the same way that other sciences deal with their environment: that is, by living within it and interpreting that which is given.[1] For man to know and interpret his environment properly there is one supreme prerequisite, according to Oman, and that is sincerity of feeling. One of the key principles of Oman's methodology was his insistence on the need for sincerity in responding to the environment. He applied this approach quite rigorously in his interpretation of religion when he declared that insincerity of feeling is the most corrupting, destroying and repelling factor in man's relationship with his environment and the effects of this attitude are especially devastating in his relationship with the Supernatural in the realm of religion. Sincerity of feeling means even more to Oman than intellectual integrity or moral character, for a man may in all appearance think logically and conduct his life along moral lines, and yet "his mind and conscience be as elusive for earnest thought or moral insight as a ghost for cold steel."[2] The essence of insincerity in religion, according to Oman, may be defined as that attitude of dealing dishonestly with the basic confrontation of reality by attempting to dictate one's own meaning to reality rather than letting it give its own witness, which in turn results in man's dealing unrealistically with himself and with all his relationships.

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 72.

[2] Ibid., pp. 77-78.

Having thus described the nature of the religious environment, Oman attempted a classification of all religions. He believed that all religions are in various ways basically religions of redemption, and that if one only sees redemption in the highest religion, then he has failed to understand the basic quality of every religion; therefore, he sought to classify religions according to the type of redemption which they claimed to give. Oman had actually determined this criterion very early in his thought when in Grace and Personality he explained that the factor which distinguishes the Christian religion from all others was the nature of the redemption which it provided, namely, not renunciation of the world, but redemption from it by reconciliation.[1]

The basic problem which religion seeks to solve is the relation between the Natural and the Supernatural, which according to Oman, means the relation between the changing or evanescent, and the abiding or eternal. All religion in some way seeks redemption from the evanescent, and every religion, even the most naturalistic, seeks some form of the eternal. Oman approved of Ritschl's statement that in every religion, "what is sought with the help of this superhuman spiritual power reverenced by man, is a solution of the contradiction in which man finds himself, as both a part of the world of nature and a spiritual personality claiming to

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 111.

dominate nature."[1] The real character of a religion, Oman explained, is determined by the way that it approaches the problem of the evanescent with its concept of the Supernatural. Although there is no priority of time involved in man's experience with the Natural and the Supernatural, there is a sense in which man's relation to the natural is primary and his relation to the Supernatural or his concept of God is secondary, for actually the moral experience precedes the theological.[2] It may be here that Ritschl has influenced Oman's basic method of approach to religion most significantly by stressing the priority of man's relation to the world, for Ritschl said that religious knowledge

> moves in independent value-judgements, which relate to man's attitude to the world, and call forth feelings of pleasure or pain, in which man either enjoys the dominion over the world vouchsafed him by God, or feels grievously the lack of God's help to that end.[3]

Oman weakened his theology when he placed priority on man's valuation of his experience with the world before his acknowledgement of the claims the Supernatural makes upon him. It may be only a minute distinction that Oman has admitted, and it will be granted that man has his experience with the Supernatural in the midst of his dealings with the Natural, but there is a

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[1]Ritschl, Die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung, 3rd edition, Vol. III, p. 189, quoted by Oman in Natural and Supernatural, p. 20, and referred to in Faith and Freedom, pp. 360-61.

[2]Natural and Supernatural, p. 367.

[3]Ritschl, Justification and Reconciliation, p. 205.

limitation here which involved Oman's whole system, for having admitted this structural priority, Oman's thought never recovered the revelational initiative in religion.

Oman concluded his interpretation of the basis on which he classified religions by declaring that a religion must be evaluated upon both its approach to the Natural, and its theological understanding of the Supernatural, for a religion receives its distinguishing characteristics by the way that it unites these two principles. The basic quality of a religion is therefore determined by its concept of redemption as it is evaluated morally and theologically.[1]

Upon this criterion Oman presented his major classifications: primitive, polytheistic, pantheistic and mystical, ceremonial-legal, and prophetic. He defined their distinguishing characteristics:[2]

(1) "Redemption by seeking the abiding in the Natural through faith in an animistic force indefinitely many and vaguely one." All primitive religions are included in this category.

(2) "Redemption as the management of the Natural by faith in the Supernatural conceived as individual spirits who rule over various parts of the Natural." Within this classification are included all polytheisms.

(3) "Redemption either by accepting the Natural in its wholeness

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 367.

[2] The brief definitions which follow are from Natural and Supernatural, pp. 368-70.

as the Supernatural, or by excluding the Natural wholly from the Supernatural, as illusion." The former Oman calls Cosmic Pantheism, which can be distinguished from the religion of nature because of its dialectical method rather than its understanding of faith. The latter is Acosmic Pantheism or Acosmic Mysticism. He concluded that Acosmic Pantheism and Acosmic Mysticism differ from one another in method rather than in essence, for both interpret the abiding as "mere undifferentiated unity" and each comes to the end result of a "feeling which has no objective meaning and victory, of a self that has no difference of quality or profit from experience, and of a universe which has no meaning or purpose in its changes. In all it is the unchanging oneness which alone abides amid the fleeting."[1] Oman's Ritschlian distrust of mysticism carried over into his interpretation of the Christian religion, for he believed that strictly speaking there could be no such thing as Christian mysticism. Although he admitted that mysticism may have the value of recollecting or recovering the forms of Christian experience which keep the content from being mere meaningless impressions or activities, he nevertheless insisted that mysticism was essentially an escape from the world and the moral claims of God.[2]

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, pp. 368-70.

[2] Ibid. Oman spoke very pointedly about Christian mysticism when he said:

> Though the church benefited more than the world from the services of the Catholic mystics, some of them were capable and efficient persons. We may think that St. Theresa might have been better occupied than shutting up young girls in nunneries and tightening the rules over them, but there is no doubt that she was a very

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(4) "Redemption by distinguishing sharply in the Natural the secular from the sacred, and in the Supernatural the power of good from the power of evil." In this type of religion the sacred is thought of as material in nature, and redemption is obtained by obeying ritual and ethical ceremonial laws; it is called Ceremonial-Legalistic, and includes Zoroastrianism, priestly Judaism, and Mohammedanism.

(5) "Redemption as reconciliation to the Natural by faith in one personal Supernatural, who gives meaning to the Natural and has a purpose beyond it." This is the only genuine monotheism, according to Oman, because it sees that God has a purpose which is large enough to include the Natural as well as the Supernatural. There is something of this basic quality in all religions and no religion possesses it exclusively; however, it receives its most adequate expression in Prophetic Judaism and Christianity, and if these are considered together, it may be called Prophetic

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(footnote continued from page 93)
forcible character. Probably also we cannot deny an increase in St. John of the Cross's practical discernment, any more than we can deny an increase of Suso's distressing sentimentality. But most of the mystics would have been very ill to live with, as good people ought not to be: and the writings of those who carried out the full cult of withdrawal from ideas of the senses, claims of desire, discursive thought, all lack the simple directness of reality." Natural and Supernatural, p. 500. Cf. Ritschl, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 98, 112-14.

Evelyn Underhill was very critical of Oman's interpretation of mysticism. She noted that while Oman persisted in rejecting "the sense of the holy in the Mystic Saints" he maintained an emphasis on the witness of feeling that "would shock St. John of the Cross." "Supernatural Religion," The Spectator (Feb. 27, 1932), p. 293. The force of her criticism may be somewhat lessened when it is remembered that Oman interpreted feeling primarily as intuitive awareness rather than emotion.

Monotheism.

Even though it has been suggested that all religions are concerned with redemption in that they strive for the Supernatural in the midst of the changing Natural, prophetic religion is the only one which attributes reconciliation altogether to God throughout the whole breadth of man's experience. The prophets were reconciled to God in all of their experiences of difficulty and travail in such a way as to make it clear that reconciliation is not just one aspect of religion but the essence of it. Their monotheism was not a metaphysical assertion of the oneness of God but the conviction that there is no area of man's experience which does not reveal God's reconciling purpose in and beyond this world.

Prophetic religion, according to Oman, is not distinguished by its doctrine of the Supernatural, although this is certainly involved, but by its approach to the Natural. Prophetic religion interprets the Natural as a realm in which meaning and purpose may be realized, and in which all things work for good. Its monotheism and the doctrine of reconciliation are therefore united. Prophetic monotheism is not the result of metaphysical argument, but it is

> a development of the way all life, from the beginning, has advanced into higher environment, mainly by recognizing through the higher a higher use of the lower. The revelation of the Supernatural was by reconciliation to the Natural: and this was made possible by realising in the Natural the meaning and purpose of the Supernatural.[1]

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 448.

Oman came to the above conclusion on the basis of the way the prophets dealt with the horrible agonies which befell their day and civilization. They did not seek to explain away the grim realities or isolate themselves from the dangers. They understood that the Natural is passing and unenduring and really quite harmful if man uses it selfishly; therefore, they sought for a more abiding meaning which would transcend the natural. They transformed pleasant and unpleasant sensations into an interpretation of higher values which are revealed in the Natural and at the same time beyond it. Physical and moral evil were met and interpreted realistically, but God's sovereign purpose was realised in and above the evils of this world. The prophets had an assurance based on their experience that no eventuality could destroy the unity of the moral order nor defeat their faith in God's purpose in the midst of the most difficult circumstances. This conviction, Oman affirmed, remains the only adequate foundation for a belief in the oneness and sovereignty of God.

The basic conclusion of Oman's interpretation of religion is that man has the responsibility to respond in freedom to his environment in both its Natural and Supernatural aspects in such a way that all his dealings with the Natural will be an eternal revelation to him, and his consciousness of the Supernatural will be a reconciliation of all that is involved in the Natural.

> If reconciliation to the evanescent is revelation of the eternal, and revelation of the eternal a higher reconciliation to the

> evanescent, that is only as we know all environment, which is by living in accord with it. The faith in this as personal intercourse differs only by the deeper significance a higher environment gives to the personal.[1]

Religion is, therefore, the unique expression of man's concern with and relation to a higher environment which is "at least not better expressed by anything less than the mind of a person."[2] Oman has given more adequate development to the personal nature of man's environment and greater clarification of man's role in responding to the environment in his treatment of freedom, which shall be considered in the following chapter.

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 470.

[2] Ibid., p. 341.

CHAPTER V

FREEDOM

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John Oman made his most distinctive contribution to theology in his interpretation of man's freedom as the methodological and interpretative principle which gives meaning and orientation to every phase of man's response to his environment. He integrated his concept of freedom with every major aspect of his thought: religion, authority, grace and the Church were interpreted from the basic conviction that man is a being who can be true to himself in the dignity of his personality and the personal nature of his environment only if the essential freedom of his response to his environment be adequately recognized. He interpreted freedom in his characteristic comprehensiveness by attempting: (1) to describe the cosmological relations of freedom and necessity; (2) to relate freedom to the development of man in the process of evolution; (3) to interpret the relation of freedom to the Natural and Supernatural environment; and (4) to show how faith and freedom are correlated in religious experience.

The problem of relating necessity and freedom is a cosmological question, according to Oman, involving man's actual experience of living in two realms, the quantitative and the qualitative, at the same time. One aspect of man's experience takes place in a realm which can be measured and mathematically calculated according to the principle of cause and effect,

and which gives some evidence of the past actually determining the present. At the same time, man is convinced that he is living in a realm not merely quantitative, but one which somehow meaningfully and qualitatively responds to his actions and purposes. It is therefore a realm determined by the purposes toward which it is being moved, rather than merely that which has happened in the past. The basic difference between the two realms is that the quantitative order appears to be determined by the laws of cause, while the qualitative order is characterized by purposive cause which is concerned not just with things as they are, but with things as they ought to be. The quantitative and qualitative realms are both valid and necessary aspects of man's experience, and the intelligibility of the world depends upon an adequate recognition of both realms.[1] It is impossible to separate these two realms for they are really two aspects of one experience; however, there have been at least two attempts made to interpret this paradoxical situation by isolating one aspect from the other and interpreting it as a comprehensive cosmology. Oman called these attempts the "cosmological law of award" and the "cosmological law of inertia."

The "cosmological law of award" had as its thesis that "all acts are acts of freedom up to the time when actually done, and then they are awarded the exact equivalent of their merit."[2] This cosmology was dominant in the

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 218.

[2] Ibid., p. 221.

sixth century B.C., but has had some influence ever since that time. Some of its representatives, according to Oman, are Xenophanes, Plato, and legalistic Judaism, but it received its fullest cosmological expression in the Buddhistic Law of "karma" which is essentially "the exact equivalence of action and award."[1] This theory has survived because it does express, even though inadequately, the conviction that man's environment is basically founded upon justice. The element of truth within it became distorted when it was exalted into a comprehensive cosmology which allowed the theory to dictate to experience, rather than letting the experience determine the limits of the theory. This cosmology is theologically unsatisfactory, according to Oman, because it reduced God to one who merely gave awards of fate or destiny according to the exact proportion of human merit.

The other effort to resolve the tension between freedom and necessity which Oman considered was the "cosmological law of inertia." When the Newtonian laws of motion were reduced to the single law of inertia, many thought that it was possible to form a satisfactory cosmology from this one principle. This hope received encouragement from the amazing success which the mechanical law of inertia had when it was applied to

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 226. Oman drew an interesting parallel between the Buddhist law of "karma" and nineteenth century Naturalism. Both interpret the world along the lines of exact equivalence and both take this theory of equivalence to be the full measure of reality. The effect of both systems is that no real significance can be given to our experience of the world, our individuality, or to God as personal. (Cf. pp. 227f.)

the practical realm of material production. Men became obsessed with the achievements of mechanism and were hardly willing to acknowledge anything else in their environment. The belief in the quantitative equivalence of cause and effect was transformed into a cosmology by those who declared with religious fervor that the fullness of the world was only mechanical vibration and freedom an illusion.[1] Oman believed that the theory of mechanical determination was even more unsatisfactory than a theory of moral determination, and he noted that one need not embrace mechanical determinism as a cosmology to be affected by it. When the meaning of life is thought of as mere mechanical equivalence of cause and effect, our courage to live in faith in what is good is destroyed, and values have no correspondence to reality. When this situation prevails,

> the Natural ceases to be a joy and an inspiration; and the Supernatural, instead of being peace and strength and victory over ourselves, and thereby over all things seen and temporal, becomes a mere distressing uncertainty which we cannot make up our minds to dismiss. It seems folly to talk of purpose; and without purpose, it is folly to talk of spirit in the universe or in any part of it, such as ourselves. The Natural gives, in its values, no gracious, reliable good that is, and the Supernatural no power to realise the good that should be. Under this shadow men can be merry, but they cannot be blessed; they can acquire, but they cannot possess.[2]

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 234.

[2] Ibid., p. 235. Oman came unusually close to Emil Brunner's diagnosis of the threat of determinism in the modern world, for Brunner is convinced that "the denial of human freedom by a naturalistic determinism is far more characteristic of the present 'spirit of the age' than the

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Oman recognized that his own age was so dominated by the atmosphere of deterministic cosmology that it could not realize the absurdity and futility of an abstract theory which limited the world to a meaningless recurrence of motion. He admitted that the law of inertia described an important aspect of our experience with the mechanical world, but indicated that the history of science revealed the impossibility of transforming a working theory into a cosmology.[1] He was actually more effective in his rejection of the cosmological law of inertia than he was in dealing with the cosmological law of award. He made the mechanical determinism of inertia appear ridiculous, as it certainly is, when applied to every realm of experience, but he was content merely to reject the cosmological law of award without

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humanistic theory of freedom." Brunner believes that "to-day, the drift towards determinism, which our Reformers in their struggle against their sole opponents—the open liberalism of the Humanists and the disguised liberalism of Catholic theology—to some extent allowed to go unpunished, has become a far more serious matter.

Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 286-87.

[1]Natural and Supernatural, p. 239.

really coming to grips with the issue of moral consequences in man's free acts, which are in some way related to a personal God who does in his personal freedom reward and punish. While it is true, as Oman has pointed out, that many have taken the concept of award and perverted it into a cosmology divorced from experience, it is also true in a way which Oman never discussed that one need not interpret the concept of award and punishment in deterministic fashion to maintain that God is a God who rewards and punishes in a way quite commensurate with man's freedom. This omission in Oman's discussion of freedom illustrates a pattern of exposition and interpretation which frequently weakens his thought. He is often quite satisfied to reject a partial aspect or a false solution to a problem and then never proceed to acknowledge or interpret the aspect of truth which is actually present in the issue.[1]

Although Oman never said very clearly how our acts of freedom produce moral consequences and are related to reward and punishment, he did maintain that the failure of either the equivalence of action and award or the equivalence of cause and effect to provide an adequate cosmology does not alter the fact that man does live in a world where his acts of

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[1]For example, this tendency will be noticed in Oman's criticism of "external authority," and his treatment of the Church as an institution, and in other places which shall be noted; however, at this point it will suffice to observe that Oman never really dealt adequately with the moral consequences of man's freedom which are in some measure to be interpreted as award and punishment.

freedom produce commensurate awards, and where causes and effects do appear in reliable sequence. The scientific approach, which he said at times may be quite unscientific, is often characterized by the assumption of a closed order of mechanical causation, and the moral order is usually thought of as a realm where freedom introduces new conditions. Both of these aspects of man's experience with the world are valid in their proper realms, for science has the responsibility of interpreting the continuity of experience in the midst of change, and morality has the task of interpreting new decisions as though they are not enslaved to the past. Therefore, since man is continually involved with freedom and necessity in his practical experience, it should be possible to reconcile them in interpretation.

Oman was keenly aware of the most advanced developments of the science of his day, and he looked in that direction for a possible amelioration of the antithesis between necessity and freedom. Though the Quantum Theory, "that energy is not a mere diffused system of infinite gradation, but occurs in certain definite units" was still a relatively new theory, it gave evidence and support for the belief that nature is far more than a closed mechanical system. It stressed that nature tends to individualize itself and implied that mind should not be treated as an intruder in the universe but placed at the very center of interpretation.[1] The theory of Relativity, which Oman

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 249.

admitted could only be understood by those who have mastered higher mathematics, "reintroduces the mind which physics has seemed to ignore, by relating the order of time and space to the observer."[1] These theories, as interpreted by Oman, meant that the universe could not now be interpreted according to the Newtonian concepts of matter and cause. The law of inertia interprets one aspect of man's experience but not the whole of it as once believed. Oman therefore believed that the science in his day had substantiated James Ward's prophetic statement that "the advance of physics is proving the most effectual cure for this ignorant faith in matter and motion, as the inmost substance, rather than the most abstract symbol of the sum of existence." Furthermore, Oman concluded that modern science was bearing out Ward's interpretation

> that the real world is the concrete, wherein no two things, no two events are ever the same, in development and progress, and that identity and uniformity is a mere device for enabling our finite minds to deal with an experience of endless variety, and that it is truer to say that the universe is a life than that it is a mechanism.[2]

Nevertheless, Oman believed that there is a reliable or fixed order in the world which, if properly interpreted could provide an important clue to the relationship between freedom and necessity. There is the "exactly calculable frame of things"[3] which is a kind of reliable rigidity

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 249.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 252.

in the world which does not exclude meaning, but which is necessary as a framework upon which meaning may be imposed and from which meaning may be drawn. The fact that man knows meaning in his environment and can even place his own meaning upon it is the very reason why he probes behind phenomena to interpret the reliability of his world through the fixed symbols of science. It is the responsibility of science to interpret the meaning of environment through symbols in such a way that it will not dictate the meaning which we want to express through our environment, nor circumscribe the meaning which environment gives to us through the symbols. The proper starting point for this task is concern with the meaning of environment, rather than with its quantitative nature. For example, speech and music are possible because there is a fixed and reliable environment which responds to man's desire to communicate his meaning, but the way to approach speech and music is to seek to understand their meaning, rather than to calculate and quantitatively measure their sound. Science is man's free but limited attempt to understand the meaning of his environment in its quantitative aspect and is therefore not adequate to produce a cosmology; however, it is a necessary and effective instrument of interpretation which endeavors to enable man to deal practically with his environment and to discover ways to make the world convey his meaning.[1]

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 252.

Dr. H. H. Farmer's interpretation of the world as the medium or symbol of God's personal relationship with man is strikingly similar to Oman's emphasis, although Dr. Farmer goes on to state the significance of this concept for freedom more clearly than Oman. (continued on next page)

Oman's interpretation of freedom in its cosmological setting may therefore be summarized by saying that he believed man's experience of freedom could not be negated by any deterministic interpretation either moral or mechanical, and that the mechanical framework of natural law did not exhaust the meaning of the world, but provided the necessary reliability and order of the world which enabled a man to interpret its meaning and express his own meaning upon it by the exercise of his freedom. By dealing with the breadth and scope of freedom in its cosmological context, Oman emphasized the infinite significance of man's freedom, for the consideration of the heavens and the ordinances of nature, even in its modern framework of natural law, is still an appropriate context in which to ask the question, "what is man that thou art mindful of him?"[1] His conviction that it

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(footnote continued from page 107)
Dr. Farmer says:

> In the highest personal relationship the other does what I desire, not because my will has been imposed on his, but because we are in the same world of values, because my insights have become his insights, my meanings his meanings. So it is in God's personal dealing with man; and because it is so, there is necessitated a world as the medium of the relationship. For a conveying of meaning which is not a mere imposition of it seems to require that it should be mediated through symbols. By a symbol we mean a sign which indicates meaning, and the peculiar quality of a symbol is that it can only enter formatively into the mind of another, and affect his activity, if he in some measure apprehend its meaning and accept it for himself. It is not possible for a symbol whose meaning cannot be read, or being read is not accepted, to enter formatively into the personal life. It has to stay, so to say, on the frontiers of the mind.
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> The world is God's symbol, God's medium of speech with the soul of man. Farmer, The World and God, p. 70.

[1]Psalm 8:4.

is "not till we have traversed immensity and eternity have we attached any adequate meaning to the assertion that the things of the spirit have greater issues depending on them than the mightiest law or the vastest process,"[1] is surely valid, and Oman's cosmological considerations have provided a valuable dimension of interpretation which a purely religious treatment could never have given.

Another phase of Oman's comprehensive orientation to the problem of freedom was his consideration of the important issues raised for freedom in the anthropological framework of the theory of evolution. The theory of evolution was interpreted by Oman not only as being compatible with freedom, but as giving evidence and confirmation of the existence of freedom and its significance in environment and history.

The Newtonian theory, which had assumed that the world was a closed mechanical system in which there could be nothing really new, received a serious challenge when the discoveries of Darwin revealed that life on earth was in an evolutionary change which was not mere recurrence but which, with reference to both origins and goals, suggested progress. However, Darwin believed that his theory of evolution could be interpreted within the framework of the law of inertia as long as it was recognized that the destruction of the unfit was to some degree the result of the actions and purposes of the creature. Soon Darwin's theory was transformed into a

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 327.

Newtonian Darwinism, and the theory of evolution, which had at first appeared to destroy any belief in the universe as a closed mechanical order, was "turned into a triumph so great as to seem to justify the confidence that some day the mechanical explanation would cover the whole field of knowledge and dispose of every suggestion of freedom as exploded superstition."[1] Even so, Oman did not believe that evolution had to be interpreted along mechanical lines. The mechanical interpretation of life acknowledges the fact that all of life is involved with mechanical processes, but it does not begin to deal adequately with such questions as the place of meaning, mind and purpose in life. Evolution may have shown man that he was later than he formerly believed in dealing with his environment with value and freedom, but this does not alter the fact that it is this free and meaningful response to environment which gives significance to life and makes any mechanical interpretation of it impossible.

> And if life be thus developing towards mind and purpose, and if nothing can be known concerning it except from this its high achievement, is it not more rational and convincing to carry mind and purpose as far down as we can than to carry up mechanical explanations to the utmost limits of plausibility.[2]

It is precisely at this point, according to Oman, that Darwin was significant. By stressing the struggle for survival which the creature has against its environment, Darwin illustrated the truth that there is an element of

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 259.

[2] Ibid., p. 264.

independence or freedom, however small, in even the lowest form of life. Darwin has therefore made a significant contribution to our understanding of the universe, "but it is in the direction of freedom and not of process."[1]

One of the strongest aspects of Oman's interpretation of freedom is the way in which he deals with the dangers and evils which are possible in a universe where freedom is real. He readily admitted that if the universe is constructed along the lines of freedom and if evolution is an unfolding of this order of freedom, the achievements of freedom are won at the expense of heavy losses along the way. Oman would have agreed with Emil Brunner, who said: "Humanly speaking—must not the hand of God have trembled when He created man with this independence? For . . . it is the most dangerous, and indeed the only dangerous element which God has created."[2] Oman realized that many find it difficult to believe that the pain and evil which freedom causes, or at best allows, can ever be justified by the victories of freedom. It appears that individual freedom is attained only in an order which allows many to fail in their purposes and suffer overwhelming defeats. Would it not have been far better, they ask, to have mechanically elevated everyone in a scheme of cosmic process and foregone the privileges of freedom? Oman answered that surely the evils do exist in an order of freedom, but therein lies the justification for freedom and the only way possible to interpret the universe rationally, because if evil is

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 273.

[2] Brunner, Man in Revolt, pp. 286-87.

only a result of process and not an aspect of struggle and achievement, then there is no solution to evil possible, for process without freedom cannot correct itself. He concluded that

> the way of freedom, though its final justification can only be its goal, at least saves life from being a dull as well as a ghastly nightmare, because, with it, there is a universe of living interests while, without it, there would be no more than a Punch and Judy show with conscious and sensitive puppets. And supposing an infinite mind contemplating it, could we expect him to be eternally interested in making it pirouette around him, however graceful and intricate he could make the performance.[1]

One of the most serious issues which the theory of evolution raised for the interpretation of freedom was brought about by the stress which evolution put upon the continual change of one moral phase into a higher phase which apparently obliterated all absolute moral distinctions. Oman very wisely refused to allow the theory of evolution to force him to abandon the category of absoluteness. He felt that it would be "iron in the blood of our age" if we could realize as Kant had emphasized that absolute distinctions are valid even though we may be slow in accepting them.[2] Oman's position was that "without absoluteness, nothing is sacred; if nothing is sacred, there is no real morality; if there is no real morality, progress is a meaningless word; if progress is a meaningless word, change is an aimless process."[3] Absoluteness is present when one acts

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 290.

[2] Faith and Freedom, p. 189.

[3] Natural and Supernatural, pp. 326-27.

conscientiously toward his higher environment, and it is a mistake to think that absoluteness can be present only when there is the actual realization of an ideal standard. Absoluteness is basically determined by the direction one is going and evolution interprets the absolute difference in direction as clearly as any "infallible imperative of right and wrong."[1] Evolution

> is not a mere question of slow change, but of direction. Absoluteness of particular acts may be affected by slow realisation, but not the absoluteness of the direction in which we are facing. In the end this must put right and wrong as infinitely apart as the old way of expressing it as heaven and hell.[2]

Oman maintained that the moment man makes the distinction between right and wrong, however dimly, he is a religious creature, and one may wonder whether he would be man if he did not possess this capacity.[3] This acknowledgement of absoluteness which Oman made with regard to the matter of direction involved in evolution, and in man's decisions in history is an important and constructive aspect of Oman's thought which has important implications for his interpretation of religious authority. Oman must be criticized in later discussions for allowing his personal existentialism to lead him to an over-balanced individualism which tended to reject any kind of "external" authority, but it must be very clearly understood that his existentialism did

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 327.

[2] Ibid., p. 293.

[3] John Oman, review of C.J. Shebbeare and Joseph McCabe's The Design Argument Reconsidered, Journal of Theological Studies (Vol. XXVI, 1925), p. 87-88.

not lead him into the kind of relativism which denies the possibility of absolute moral distinctions. While it is true that Oman criticized very severely the "external" authorities which pose as "infallibilities" it is to his credit that he never at any place, even in a discussion involving the early stages of evolution, intended to discredit certainty or absoluteness in moral distinctions provided these convictions were the product of the truth as it was received by man in freedom.

Oman's conclusion that evolution was not just a structural development which was determined by an original force, but a development of freedom in response to a higher direction toward which life was being drawn, led him quite appropriately into the next major consideration in his interpretation of freedom: the relation of man's freedom, especially in his moral experience, to his Natural and Supernatural environment. He considered the "will to live" the basic experiential source or form of man's freedom, and maintained that from this source there springs man's desire to "live better."[1] This raised the question of whether man has the ability to perform that which he feels he ought to do. Oman believed that Kant's principle that "a man can because he ought" was not an adequate interpretation of man's moral experience because it interpreted the "will to live better" as only a moral maxim which man can accomplish by sheer will power. According to Oman, Kant was right when he held that freedom

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[1]Natural and Supernatural, p. 298.

does have the authority to acknowledge an absolute claim which is not determined by its benefits to the individual. He was also right when he emphasized that nothing is really good unless it is freely chosen; however, Oman believed that Kant's interpretation of ethics was inadequate when he limited absolute claim upon man to a moral maxim, regardless of how categorical it may be. According to Oman, the absolute claim which is made on man is made on the whole personality and character of man, not just on his moral faculties, and this claim is laid on him by the whole of his environment. Oman should be commended for dealing with freedom as it relates to the whole man and not just to his will, for this saves his interpretation not only from an artificial division of personality, but also from the problem of showing at what psychological point responsibility enters into man's relationship with his environment, as if freedom were a thing or a "function" of the will which enters into man's moral experience.

Oman admitted that to a large extent our wills determine our character, although he did not define very adequately the extent of this determination. He was primarily concerned to emphasize that the freedom which God intends for his children involves far more than the ability of man's will concerning a moral maxim. He made perhaps his clearest statement regarding the inability of man's will to respond properly to his environment when he declared:

> Though there is a sense in which we can because we ought, it is, therefore, obviously not in the sense that we can by mere fiat of will, it matters not what kind of persons we are or in what kind[1]

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[1]Due to a typographical error, page117 immediately follows page page 115. The continuity of text is uninterrupted.

> of world we act, do what we see to be right, or even put ourselves in the way of seeing what right truly is.[1]

If man is to be genuinely free he must, in a sense, be made free by the response of his total personality to both his Natural and his Supernatural environment. To be free in the Natural means to reject the dominance of the fleeting things of life and respond appropriately to the higher environment of the Supernatural which is revealed in the Natural and which enables man to live properly in the Natural. To be free in the realm of the Supernatural means to accept freely, reverently, and sincerely the absolute value and claim of the Supernatural environment, which reveals itself so clearly that it needs no external authority for support, and which can acknowledge no other authority above itself. Oman maintained that according to this understanding, no one is free. "At best we are only being made free. Yet only as we are thus free, are we the kind of persons, in the kind of environment, who, in practical experience, can because we ought."[2]

To illustrate the thesis that man should respond in his total personality to his whole environment, Oman made a distinction between conscience and conscientiousness. The conscience is not infallible, nor does it provide us with finality, but it is that faculty of man which presents to him those values and obligations that should be received as absolutely sacred. Conscientiousness is interpreted by Oman as being that attitude

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 302.

[2] Ibid.

of reverence and sincerity toward our environment which is ever striving toward more light and a better realization of that truth which has already been received. Oman felt that Kant had interpreted the conscience as the moral form of the individual in such a way that it was seen to produce only moral maxims that were little more than intuitional generalities, primarily negative in nature, which failed to consider the fact of difference in individuals.[1] While Kant failed to realize that the conscience is but the form of moral experience and that the form cannot supply the content of experience, Oman believed that the form of experience had value if it were interpreted along the lines of a conscientiousness which continually endeavors to correspond more completely to the witness of the whole environment.

Oman realized that he could speak of absoluteness and conscientiousness in man's experience because man's environment is essentially personal in nature. Man can make progress from the lower or actual level of his life to the higher or the ideal level when he, as a self-conscious being, freely chooses the higher course, and this kind of decision is possible only in a universe which is personal and capable of responding to man's freedom. Our environment is, therefore, not just an area for pleasure or pain in the realm of biological progress, but a realm where all of our experiences are of the nature of personal intercourse which may contribute, if interpreted aright, to the progress of the spirit.

Oman portrayed the personal nature of man's intercourse with his

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, pp. 319, 320.

environment by a consideration of the absolute value of truth, beauty, and goodness. He insisted that truth and beauty and goodness have absolute value whether men accept them or not. He went on to declare that truth and beauty and goodness are not material and impersonal substances which are mechanically imposed on man, but they are absolute values which have significance only when they are freely accepted by man, and when they are accepted in such a way that they transform his character. When a man realizes that his Supernatural environment is a realm of free persons where he may refuse or accept the claims of value made upon him, he can understand more fully what it means to interpret God as a person. Oman concluded:

> An order which is thus a realm of the free children of God, and not a theatre of even the most admirable puppets, and has its values in even the imperfect accord of their freedom, and not in the most perfectly correct opinions and gracious sentiment and impeccable behaviour imposed on them, is at least not better expressed by anything less than the mind of a person.[1]

Although Oman never gave an adequate interpretation of the effects of sin upon man's freedom, it is true that one of his most adequate treatments of the nature of sin is in connection with his discussion of man's freedom in relation to his personal environment. When sin is considered as more than a lack of perfection in evolution, and more than an irregularity in a system of process, and even more than a transgression of a moral law, and when it is interpreted in the fuller context of an insincere and

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 341.

hypocritical response in all of our relations with the whole of our environment which is essentially personal, then the essential personal nature of sin can be understood. As long as sin is believed to be merely against process, there can be no such thing as forgiveness, for process cannot atone or restore, but when it is understood that "the essence of sin is estrangement from our true environment," which is essentially personal in nature, then there can be hope for a reconciliation with that environment, and furthermore,

> if we find forgiveness a real and transforming experience, we shall be able to speak of God as a person with the certainty that we are not merely seeing the reflexion of our own faces, but know that our own forgiveness of others is a reflexion of the highest perfection which is kind to the unthankful and evil. [1]

Oman was not primarily concerned with the cosmological or anthropological framework for freedom, however, for his main interest lay in the religious significance of freedom and what he called the problem of faith and freedom, and he made the solution, or the amelioration, of this problem one of the major endeavours of his life and thought. He declared that "the ultimate problem of at least the last two centuries" is "the relation of Faith and Freedom, the problem of how Faith is to be absolute and Freedom absolute, yet both one." [2] The long struggle in history between faith and freedom convinced him that there was no essential conflict between the two realities,

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 342. Cf. also pp. 327-29.

[2] Faith and Freedom, p. 4.

but rather that faith is not possible except through freedom, and freedom, even in the practical realm, can only survive as a spiritual result of faith. Man must realize that the mechanical structure of his life is but the framework for his freedom, and no external authority can be an adequate basis for his faith.

Oman maintained that from the Reformation to Ritschl there had been the development of the mechanical system of law which had been accompanied by an equally significant development of the idea of freedom and a consideration of the important issues which it raises for faith. The tremendous importance of freedom and its full implications for every area of man's thought and activity really only began to be realized, according to Oman, when men understood freedom to claim its prerogative alongside the extensive system of mechanical law and when men acknowledged that conscience had the authority to make decisions even in the processes of evolution. Oman realized that Ritschl had not completely solved the problem of faith and freedom, but he believed that Ritschl had interpreted the task and method of theology in a way which greatly clarified the ultimate significance of freedom. With Ritschl as his guide, Oman sought to conserve the insights of rationalism on the form of freedom as the basic structure of moral personality and the conviction that nothing is really good unless freely chosen, and went on, as Ritschl had done, to interpret freedom with a clearer understanding of its significance for individuality and for history.

Ritschl interpreted freedom as that personal quality of an individual

which gave him his basic distinction not only between himself and the world, but also between himself and God. Ritschl's task is therefore described by Oman, in words that might well depict Oman's own thesis in his interpretation of Grace:

> He labours so to conceive the operations of God's grace as to exalt and not to obliterate the human personality, and he continually takes up his parable against that mysticism which teaches that 'the life of God works in the believer at the cost of moral freedom', in the belief that no error has so widely, so continuously, so deeply corrupted Christianity.[1]

Furthermore, Ritschl made freedom central in his theology by insisting:

> Man and his vocation are supreme realities; victory over the world is at once our supreme need and the supreme evidence of God's help; free-will is the basis of all rationality; the judgement of worth is the fragmentary but moral comprehension of the universe.[2]

Oman also believed that Ritschl's method illustrated the important historical developments of the problem of faith and freedom in the following way: Ritschl insisted that man has not only the privilege but the responsibility of personal freedom under God to follow the truth in investigation wherever it leads. Ritschl was not alone in this conviction, but he did reinterpret all of Church history in such a way as to emphasize its importance. Ritschl also made a contribution in his position on the necessity of solitary dedication to the truth, for Oman believed that there had never been any progress made without someone who had been willing to stand alone for

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 356.

[2] Ibid., p. 357.

the truth even unto death. Still another theme in Ritschl's method was his emphasis on the value of the individual as an authority which is above the authority of an institution. Oman recognized that it was impossible to overlook the significance of the Church or State as an institution, but he was convinced that man's greater understanding of the immensity of the universe made it impossible for him to conceive of any institution as the ultimate basis for his spiritual allegiance. The institution which was once considered so important because of its size now appears relatively insignificant in comparison with the universe as we know it. There has, however, appeared a new standard of greatness which has no relation to size when one realizes that God deals directly with man and that man has the real freedom to accept or reject His law. Conscience, therefore, cannot share its authority with any institution.

> If conscience has an absolute right to govern the world, it cannot divide its throne with another sovereign; if the very mark of conscience is to announce right, free from all other considerations, all other considerations whatsoever must be subordinated. The tremendous thing about right, as distinct say from deference, is that it lays us directly on the bosom of reality. If right is right, and not a misleading synonym for convention, it rests on the pillars of the world, and makes a man in all humility a king in Divine right.[1]

The final aspect of Ritschl's method which Oman made the basic thesis of his own theology was the principle that freedom is "not merely the fundamental, it is the exclusive basis of spiritual belief now left to us. We must

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 399.

now found faith upon the very thing we have so long feared would destroy it."[1]

From his observations of the development of the problem of faith and freedom in the last two centuries, and from his conclusions concerning the significance of Ritschl's method in interpreting those developments, Oman formulated the thesis that if freedom and its consequences are real, then it is possible to make absolute distinctions in life.

> A view of life is involved which has God on one side and whatever we like to call the absence of good on the other. Evil can no more be the mere necessary shadow of good. Between the choice of agreement with eternal right and disagreement with it there must be something of the absolute distance of heaven and hell.[2]

If freedom is a reality and not just an illusion or a misunderstanding of process, then it is possible to make absolute distinctions in history. History is not only a process which conditions or affects man's life, for history is itself also affected by man's free choices; consequently, if man's decisions concerning good and evil do not involve important results in history, then history really has no significance at all.

> History interests itself in institutions, but is a long record of their insecurity, and if they were not for the building up of something spiritual they were all passing vanities. History interests itself in culture, but if that only concerns the intellect it is writing upon sand. History interests itself in races, but if they are only the playthings of destiny, they are as the

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 401.

[2] Ibid., p. 404.

> swarm of summer flies. To find the strings which work this puppet-show may add to the interest: it cannot add to the sense of reality.[1]

But if man is really free, and if his consciousness of right reflects the ultimate nature of his environment, then history is a meaningful record of man's progress and failure in achieving God's purpose. The real worth of history, and that in which men are more truly interested, is not in history as an impersonal document of events, but as a living record of men's noble decisions in the great crises of their lives and times. Freedom in an institution is easily distorted and corrupted but the freedom of a courageous individual has absolute value and produces eternal consequences. An individual man with his aspirations and objectives, therefore, has an absolute value which cannot be determined by the quantitative standards of space or time, nor can his worth be derived from any institution or culture in society. When men's free choices are seen to have absolute worth in their relationship to God's purpose, then history may be understood to possess not only finite but infinite significance. "History, being in this way a continual dealing of man with God, is all of the nature of a revelation."[2]

The interpretation of freedom also has important consequences regarding the nature and necessity of religion. If man is really free, the

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 408-09.

[2] Ibid., p. 410.

history of religions is the history of his struggle to keep freedom alive, and of the striving of his freedom toward the eternal in the midst of the changing. If, however, there are no genuine issues for freedom, but only determined processes, then religion is totally irrelevant and unnecessary. The concept of determined process cannot explain why man believes that he has a sense of obligation and an awareness of being strengthened by his religions. If freedom is a reality, one can at least begin to understand man's experience with his world as a relationship which is dependent upon a belief of both his freedom and the freedom which undergirds his world. "In that case religion must be as vital a concern as morality, and right morality and true religion must be in entire accord."[1] Religion and morality cannot be identified for religion is concerned not only with the will but with feeling as intuition, and also with understanding, for faith must be intelligent. Religious faith must not only include the will, the feeling and the intellect, but it must integrate them in one vision. This vision is not attained by intellectual means alone, but it is perceived when one evaluates himself and his world in the light of the struggle for his freedom in a world which is on one hand his greatest enemy and on the other hand completely constituted for his good. The way of faith involves one's total experience of life, and faith can advance only when one responds appropriately to the

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 411.

insights which he has been given; consequently, the progress of the history of religions is complex and it is slow, but it is this very struggle for freedom which gives meaning to every aspect of man's religious life.

This significance of freedom in the history of religions was developed further by Oman as a principle in determining whether there is any absolute distinction between Christianity and other religions. When the essence of Christianity is believed to be the visible church whic is primarily an institution with ecclesiastical authority, Chris

poral significance, and although it may be the no

claim men's ultimate and absolute allegiance. Even if it embodied infallibility as an institution, it could only be a temporal phenomenon.

> But if Christianity is rather obscured by those external buttresses which we have tried so hard to maintain; if its real meaning lies in the absence of these external authorities, and if the process which to so many has seemed to be sapping its foundation has only been displaying its true proportions; if it trusts to nothing in the last issue except reconciliation and grace; if it will be satisfied with nothing less than a relation to God in which we shall be wholly free intellectually and morally, it must belong to the absolute, the eternal order.[1]

Even so, the absolute distinction between Christianity and the other religions can be maintained only when Christ's absolute difference from other men is acknowledged. Christianity became involved in the evils of the world in order that men might learn that freedom is not only a gift which is received, but that it is also a capacity which must be developed by

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[1] Faith and Freedom, pp. 412-13.

proper use. To understand the Christian religion it is necessary to return continually to Christ. Although Christ can be known outside the Church, the Church cannot be adequately interpreted when separated from Him. To illustrate the place of Christ in the Christian religion, Oman used the analogy of the concept of right in morals. Just as the concept of right, regardless of its complexity, obscurity, and error in application, holds absolute significance for every moral man, so Christ notwithstanding the difficulties involved in knowing His life, the confusion concerning His importance, and the misinterpretation of His meaning, embodies that which is not only relative but absolute in obligation to every religious man.[1] It must be remembered that

> the Person of Jesus loses all real significance as soon as we interpret Him mainly as the Founder of an outwardly authoritative institution. The key is lost to all His unique greatness when the freedom of a Son in His Father's house is omitted, and the gift of this freedom to His followers is regarded as a Protestant prejudice.[2]

Christ revealed the complete freedom which is possible only to one who is perfectly related to God and therefore Oman concluded that the Christian religion is absolutely distinct from the other religions of the world.

Oman had little sympathy for the belief that everything is relative and that nothing is final, and that the only result of our striving is the privilege of further struggle. He attempted to modify this position by asking how

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 413.

[2] Ibid., p. 322.

can there be any distinction between what is higher and lower in our striving if there is no realization of absolute value in the present struggle? He maintained that man can have absolute convictions that are dependent on neither argument or tradition when he receives God and his truth in freedom. God's revelation awakens in man the singular and noble qualities that are in all men. It is therefore foolish to expect God's revelation to be written on the skies, for it is "written on something far greater—on the souls it has made free."[1] The prophets and the apostles, therefore, were men who had received the freedom which God had given them. When revelation is interpreted in this way, man's freedom becomes an important factor in the principles of Biblical criticism. If the significance of freedom be acknowledged, man may become impatient with those "who never wrote an inspired sentence in their lives and who do not know that an inspired sentence never was written except with an attitude of inward freedom towards living events."[2] Furthermore, the critic would have the responsibility of interpreting the process and the means by which men's experiences of freedom were recorded in the literature of scripture, and regardless of his conclusions concerning authorship and date "the Scriptures would remain the heroic record of God's dealings with heroic man."[3]

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 414.

[2] Ibid., p. 415.

[3] Ibid.

Oman's emphasis on revelation as "God's response to man's aspirations after freedom"[1] had important implications for his interpretation of the place of Christ in revelation. Christ is inseparably related to all revelation, and superior to all other aspects of revelation because He deals so straight-forwardly with men in their need "that He stands quite alone in His significance for our freedom as children of God."[2] Oman felt that Ritschl did not go far enough when he gave emphasis only to Christ's revelation of God's love and moral nature, for Oman believed that Christ's revelation of God was also a revelation of God's power. Christ revealed the perfect union of God's love and power in such a way that men realized that God was not mere force or process but One who chose to deal with them in their freedom:

> When God undertakes to work with freedom, He undertakes to bear and forbear, and the method of Christ becomes the revelation of a higher Omnipotence. Power becomes love, and gains in power by being love. Power can only rule by iron law, love can rule with the freedom of God's children; power can only create a vast plaything, love can create a Kingdom of God.[3]

One of the most wholesome emphases in Oman's treatment of freedom was his frequent admission that God's method of working with man in freedom was a slow process, often accompanied by men's misuse of their freedom

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 415.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 416.

and by their failures; however, he insisted that there was no other way possible in the spiritual realm. The only way that a loving and all-powerful God can give Himself to man without His power annihilating man's will, or enslaving him, is for God to wait for man's faith in free response to His love.[1]

Another principle which Oman derived from the significance of freedom is that no institution, including the Church, should be an end in itself, but should be the means by which men are shown the privileges and responsibilities of their freedom. Oman must be criticized for a pattern of exposition which often places the individual and the institution in an artificial and unnecessary antithesis, as in such passages as this, in which he declared: "Freedom embodied in an institution may be on its way to decay; freedom embodied in a heroic soul is absolute in its worth and eternal in its influence."[2] Although it will be pointed out later that he was content to make an impossible distinction between "external" and "internal" authority, it should be acknowledged that he probably did not intend to minimize the importance of the institution. He recognized that every legitimate institution had contributed to man's struggle for freedom, but he sought primarily to emphasize the purpose of every institution to lead man to an acceptance of the responsibilities of his freedom until the

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 416.

[2] Ibid., p. 410.

institution itself should become increasingly insignificant and unnecessary. He believed that the Church more than any other institution should continually be judged and evaluated in respect to its ideal purpose, which is "to call men into the glorious liberty of God's children, always demanding of them a higher more personal faith, and a more inward more personal obedience than she has any right to demand of them for herself."[1]

Finally, Oman looked to freedom for a point of departure for a philosophy of history. God has ordained the legal aspects of our world so that the whole responsibility of freedom will not overwhelm us, and so that men may occasionally have a respite from the burden of freedom, and so that the legal element may serve as a discipline when freedom is abused. Man may tarry in the legal period of history with some profit, providing he does not stay there too long. History is made up of the cycles of Law and Gospel, and each is necessary preparation for the other; however, the dominance of external authority is an indication of the loss of freedom; therefore, all men should accept the privileges of freedom and strive to live for the Gospel. Oman concluded his interpretation of the significance of freedom by warning against an extreme rejection of all mechanical law. While it is true that mechanical interpretations have quite presumptuously attempted to ignore man and the most meaningful elements of his life by interpreting everything as a process of development, there can be nothing gained by a reckless rejection of all mechanical law and the process of

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 418.

development. Man should now have the maturity and understanding of himself to realize that the most basic realities of his life have not been affected by either law or process; therefore, Oman concluded:

> I have entirely failed in my purpose if I have not shown you that it is just when set in the midst of this vastness that freedom and faith attain their high significance. Not till we have traversed immensity and eternity have we attached any adequate meaning to the assertion that the things of the spirit have greater issues depending on them than the mightiest law or the vastest process. In the present feeble beginnings of man's freedom, nourished tenderly by God's grace, we see the baby hand that holds the sceptre of this realm, and we should resent nothing that displays either its vastness or its permanence. Thus in a higher sense than his we realize the force of Hegel's great saying: "The truth of necessity is freedom."[1]

Since Oman's contribution to theology will largely be determined by the success or failure with which he has integrated the principle of freedom into his doctrines of authority, grace, and the Church, it is necessary to turn to these specific areas where a theology of freedom may be more carefully analyzed and evaluated.

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 419.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

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RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

Oman's interpretation of freedom is so carefully integrated with his doctrine of authority, and his doctrine of authority is so consistently and comprehensively amplified into the other themes of his theology on grace and the church, that at times it is even difficult to isolate the concept of authority for exposition and evaluation; however, his major emphases are upon: (1) the loss of infallibility, (2) internal authority, (3) external authority, (4) authority and the church's creed, and (5) authority and the church's method and task. He summarized the results of his survey of the relation of faith and freedom in the last two centuries in a passage which describes his understanding of the historical and theological background of the problem of authority, and which may well serve as a point of departure for understanding the central emphasis of his own interpretation of authority:

> Christianity has no means left to it whereby to compel consent from the outside. There is no sound doctrine of Scripture which can overbear us; and just as little is there any sound doctrine of the Church. . . . The Protestant cannot say: Here is the infallible Scripture, submit to it; nor the Catholic: Here is the infallible Church, submit to it. Hence all theologies which go no deeper than Scripture texts or Church dogmas are insufficient. As soon as they turn upon us and say: It does not matter what you think, this is the doctrine of Scripture, or this is the dogma of the Church, which it is your duty to accept, they are building on

> the past in a way which our whole inquiry shows to be not only intellectually but spiritually indefensible.[1]

Infallibility, according to Oman, received its most devastating criticism from rationalism, and this movement along with the theory of evolution and the development of the historical method has made the concept of infallibility unacceptable for the modern mind. Oman pointed out, in apparent agreement, that some believe the greatest revolution of Christianity did not occur during the Reformation but in the movement broadly characterized as the Aufklärung or the Illumination. According to these interpreters, the Reformation consisted primarily in an ecclesiastical reorganization, while the old basis of external authority in Church and doctrine continued unchallenged. The Reformation was therefore, according to this view, only a preview of the more complete victory of individual freedom which was to come later in the movement of rationalism. Whatever Oman may have thought of this interpretation of the Reformation, there is no question that for him the most significant development for freedom in the history of the Church was brought about by rationalism, that movement which had at its very center "the conscious rejection of all the external, authoritative infallibilities." Rationalism was, according to Oman, the unique and radical movement of thought which had at its heart the "positive assertion that nothing is either true faith or right morality which is not our own; and that, in consequence, external authority is, in principle, an unsound basis."[2]

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 327.

[2] Grace and Personality, pp. 3-4.

The other factors which aided in destroying the concept of infallibility of Church and Scripture were evolution and the historical method. When the theory of evolution appeared, men believed that it should be interpreted as a "flow of progress on which the generations needed but to float", and the result was that moral and religious issues were blurred and apparently lost any quality of absoluteness which they may have once possessed. "Absolute distinction between truth and error, good and evil, even at the centre, disappeared from a territory where lately all had been absolute."[1] The rise of the historical method was also an important development in the destruction of infallibility. The earlier method of dogmatic authority had worked on the principle of assuming an a priori standpoint from which it might reason concerning what it believed to be appropriate to the concepts of omnipotence and omniscience, whereas the historical method sought to interpret without a priori assumptions that which God has really accomplished.[2] These movements made the concept of infallibility an anachronism which no one could honestly and realistically accept.

Oman's rejection of the a priori method in theology on the basis of rationalism, evolution and the historical method provides a significant illustration of the contrast between the philosophical orientation of his theology and the more biblical approach of neo-orthodoxy. Notice that even though Oman

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 6.

[2] Ibid.

rejected the speculative method, he did so on philosophical and historical grounds, whereas Emil Brunner rejects the a priori method at precisely the same point of interpretation of the doctrine of God on the principle that such an approach "would be impossible for a genuinely Biblical system of theology."[1] Surely Brunner uses philosophical categories for his understanding and exposition of theology just as Oman did, but Oman's theology would have been stronger if he had made a more conscious effort to show clearly the Biblical sources for his thought.

Since the dogmatic infallibilities are no longer really open to men, Oman believed that one must explore the very foundations of religious authority and return to the ultimate principles upon which the Church is founded. In thoughts which must have had their origin in Oman's early convictions regarding the Robertson Smith controversy, he reasoned that if God is a God of truth, the very essence of bad religion would be for the Church to condone and even rest its claims for authority upon that which is not truth. If this situation is to be avoided, the Church must be willing to ask

> upon what Divine word within or without the authority she sets up against man's selfish impulses truly rests. She may no longer, with hope of success, merely set forth her creed and assert her claim, and then try to find some ground for maintaining them, but she must build only as her foundations will allow.[2]

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[1]Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God (Dogmatics: Volume I, translated by Olive Wyon, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 249.

[2]Vision and Authority, p. 23.

In other words, there must be a reconciliation between the Church's "ecclesiastical confidence and her theological uncertainty,"[1] for it is only when this has been accomplished that the Church will be able to be true to herself and express effectively the proper claims of her authority.

The major thrust of Oman's development of authority was directed toward a religious reorientation of the form of freedom in rationalism which insisted that nothing is really truth for man until it has been properly accepted. Oman rejected the negative moralism and intellectualism of rationalism and characterized its attitude of self-sufficiency as being like the son who has acquired a key to the house, yet fails to understand the wider implications of his responsibilities and the fact that he may still learn from his parents.[2] Oman stressed the internal nature of that authority which only God can give and which man must receive for himself as a spiritual vision. The greatest responsibility which the Church has regarding its authority is to "establish freedom upon that impelling necessity which a man's own spiritual vision can alone impose."[3] Oman explained, in an emphasis which is entirely in keeping with his epistemology, that our experience shall always exceed our analysis, and our vision will always be more profound than our interpretation; however, ultimately every noble direction which men are

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[1] Vision and Authority, p. 23.

[2] Honest Religion, p. 19.

[3] Vision and Authority, p. 22.

given must be received as a personal insight or vision of that which is truth. He found it difficult to understand why the method of spiritual vision for discerning God's truth had been so frequently neglected by the Church throughout her history, even though the Church claimed to believe that the dignity of man and the will of God could be acknowledged in no other way. The Church itself has often been fearful of the only true means of authority and has resorted to the lower methods of compulsion and external control, but if spiritual vision is not present there can be no true progress. External regulation can never be adequate to deal with the real depths of man's involvement in evil and "even could outward compliance be enforced, it were only a hypocrisy and a dangerous covering up of a malignant sore."[1] Where vision is lacking it may not be compensated for by a claim to possess it or by the vision of another, because even the loftiest belief becomes superstition when it is held on merely external grounds. The authority of spiritual vision places upon one an obligation which is absolute in its claim for its demands are based not just upon the externals of man's life but upon the whole structure of his environment and his being. This necessity is of greater strength than any external force or physical law and since it is a necessity of man's own acceptance it is the sole guardian of his freedom.[2]

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[1] Vision and Authority, p. 24.

[2] Ibid., p. 25.

Oman taught that there is only one qualification necessary for perception of the spiritual vision, and that is childlikeness before God's truth. The one thing which men are required to do is to follow their own insight, refusing to allow the interpretation of others or their own fear and prejudices to prevent them from seeing that which they should see for themselves. The requirement is that no one should allow himself to become dominated by others but that he should seek to become really free by submitting only to that which is truth for him. Even though one may avail himself of the wisdom and counsel of those who are also seeking the truth, he must never allow them to control his freedom in the search for truth.

Oman explained himself more clearly on this matter when he made the distinction between personal authority as a primary and as a secondary source of belief. He admitted that men often hold their beliefs on the ground of the secondary authority of others who have reasons and evidence for their beliefs. This is a necessary condition for many of man's beliefs and much of his experience, and it can be a very helpful situation provided this secondary personal authority is never allowed to become the ultimate authority upon which beliefs are based. To illustrate this distinction Oman related an experience he once had in the Cologne Cathedral. He heard a monk saying, in effect, that in spite of the evidence of one's own senses, which seem to indicate that the sun goes around the earth, men believe, on the authority of the astronomers, that the earth goes round the

sun. The monk pointed out that the astronomers are merely fallible men. How much more, then, he reasoned, should men receive the witness of the infallible Church, even though, as with such doctrines as transubstantiation, the witness of one's own senses may appear against them. Oman's refutation of this interpretation was that man believes in the astronomer not because of his authority but because he has convincing reasons based on actual study and experience; moreover, an astronomer has an obligation to justify his beliefs by evidence. Thus Oman drew his conclusion that "the only primary authority is the authority of the witness of the reality, and the sole personal authority is the extent to which, in knowledge and discernment, it has been submitted to."[1]

Oman had discovered an important aspect of the Subject-Object relationship which has been so prominent in contemporary theology when he recognized that the only ultimate authority exists in the reality itself, but unfortunately, he did not emphasize the personal dynamic quality of this reality which is the other dimension of this theme. He realized the importance of surrendering oneself to the evidence of the environment, the truth of God and even to God Himself, but the freedom of God who is the addressing Subject in this relationship was never adequately acknowledged. Although Barth is willing to think of God as a particular Subject,[2] and Paul Tillich

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[1]John Oman, "The Roman Sacerdotal Hierarchy," in Why I Am and Why I Am Not a Catholic (London: Cassell & Co., Ltd., 1931), pp. 234-35.

[2]Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Volume II, The Doctrine of God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), Section I, pp. 15ff.

speaks more in terms of God as being itself as Subject, they both seek to make it clear, without denying the objective reality of God, that God is always Subject. Karl Barth says, "The Subject of revelation [God] is the Subject that remains indissolubly Subject. We cannot get behind this Subject. It cannot become an object."[1] Paul Tillich points out that "God remains the subject, even if he becomes a logical object." Therefore, "theology always must remember that in speaking of God it makes an object of that which precedes the subject-object structure and that, therefore, it must include in its speaking of God the acknowledgment that it cannot make God an object."[2] Oman was not tempted to make God a logical category in the sense which Barth and Tillich are primarily concerned to reject, but he did not escape the danger of neglecting the personal initiative of God as Subject in revelation.

Oman never tired of stressing the principle that truth is not truth for men until they have seen it for themselves and responded to it. He summarized his position quite well when he declared:

> Nothing is ours, however it may be presented to us, except we discover its truth and except it prove itself again in our experience. Mere acceptance of the conclusions of others, mere uniformity of creed or conduct with those who have gone before us,

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[1]Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. I, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Section I, p. 438.

[2]Tillich, op. cit., pp. 172-73. Cf. I Corinthians 13:12.

> mere unity through suppression of difference, is not the way by which we profit fromthe labours of the saints, or lay broad and deep our foundations on the whole experiences and discoveries and victories of mankind.[1]

The only true and ultimate authority, according to Oman, is God's truth as it gives witness to itself, for "after all possible demonstration, nothing is truth for us till it flash upon our inward sight, and something goes out of us to meet it, which makes it, when we find it, the native country of our spirits."[2] A man can therefore be a personal authority in religion only in the sense that he may speak about that which he has seen and known for himself.

Although Oman never really made the transition very effectively from his emphasis on the "form of freedom" or the necessity of personal reception of truth into the "content of freedom" or that which has been accepted as truth, he did attempt to relate the internal authority which man receives as an individual to the external authority of the Church, Scripture, Christ, and the Church's creed. Oman never really developed the historical and communal dimensions of his interpretation of authority as fully as this emphasis was needed in his theology, but he did at least acknowledge that even though religious authority is intensely personal it should not be interpreted as wholly individualistic. The individual should not be considered as an isolated being, but as one who can only know the fullness and absoluteness

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[1] Vision and Authority, p. 58.

[2] Ibid., pp. 109-110.

of his freedom when he has found his proper relation to the whole universe, and has taken his place among other men. Therefore, Oman believed that while God's revelation is given to individuals, it comes to them as they are a part of the whole race of men who live in the historical order; consequently, God's revelation is progressive and can only be understood in the context of its historical development. It is unfortunate that Oman did not develop the positive aspects of this historical theme further, but he chose rather to turn the force of his discussion in the direction of a rejection of the doctrine of infallibility.

Many believe that to keep religious authority from becoming a matter of mere individual desire or inclination that it is necessary to accept the doctrine of an infallible Church or an infallible Scripture. They believe that the Church must be an infallible spokesman for God's revelation, with an authoritative tradition for interpreting that revelation, and an infallible head to implement that truth in any of its contemporary situations. Oman declared that the Church of Rome attempted to establish this kind of authority "not without some indifference to the facts of history" but "with a clear notion of the requirements of an authority which men shall obey and not discuss."[1] He rejected the Roman claims for an infallible external authority on the grounds of the central emphasis in his interpretation of freedom—that a blind surrender to external authority is not the

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[1] Vision and Authority, p. 92.

way that God has chosen to deal with man, or the way that men should deal with one another, for this kind of submission is the sacrifice of freedom to necessity. Oman warned that if the kind of authority which Rome proposed be allowed to go unquestioned that there would be not only the loss of the noblest element in religious experience but that the whole pattern of our dealing with God and men in freedom would be denied. Oman asked if God had intended for men to be nothing more than objects in His universe who are distinguished from other things only by their being aware of the process of which they are a part, why did God not establish this mechanical perfection at the outset; why does He choose to deal with men in the limitations of their freedom in history? The doctrine of the infallibility of the Church, therefore, not only calls into question the nature of religious authority but every area of human experience.[1]

The belief in an infallible Scripture was equally unsatisfactory to Oman. He felt that the basic issue should not be approached, as it was so frequently done, by declaring the kind of authority which Scripture should have for the external authority of the Church to be secure, but that the matter should be approached by seeking to discover what kind of authority the Scripture really possesses. Oman believed that it was very difficult to discover and describe the authority of the Scriptures and he

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[1] Vision and Authority, p. 95.

simply affirmed his conviction that the Scriptures have an intrinsic quality about them to convince men of their validity if they will accept them, and then hastened on to declare that the authority of Scriptures is nevertheless not the word of God in an infallible form which may demand of men their surrender. Regardless of the way one may interpret the inspiration of the Scriptures, there appears to be no basis left for considering them as documents which God revealed by dictation to men who were as free from error as if they were mere pens in the hand of God. For whatever the authority of Scripture may be, "it is not of the infallibility of verbal inspiration."[1] Oman would have approved of the way Karl Barth recognizes that one can speak of the Bible as the Word of God only if this is an expression of faith which one has known for himself; however, Oman could have strengthened his thought considerably if he had declared as clearly as Barth does that the confession of faith, "The Bible is God's Word," is a statement which

> we allow to be true quite apart from our faith and above all our faith, allow to be true even and actually against our unbelief, we do not allow to be true as a description of our experience with the Bible, but allow to be true as a description of the act of God in the Bible, whatever the experiences may be which we have or do not have in that connection.[2]

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[1] Vision and Authority, pp. 93-94.

[2] Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. I, Section 1, p. 123. E. Brunner makes essentially the same emphasis in Revelation and Reason, p. 32.

Oman was confident that the loss of the infallibilities did not mean the defeat of the Kingdom of God, even though it might mean the destruction of some of the external manifestations of the Church. Oman was always confident that the purpose of those events which destroyed the mere externals of the Church was "not to take away what we truly possessed, but to show what we only supposed we had."[1] The Church should not regret the loss of the infallibilities, but rather be thankful that it now stands like the early Church with no other authority than that which confronts a man in freedom; and, furthermore, it should be remembered that the Church has never witnessed greater power than in those early days when it had no external means to support its claims. The fact that there are no infallible external authorities does not mean that God has failed, but that He has chosen to deal wisely and patiently with man in freedom. If one will acknowledge God's method of leading man by his freedom, he will discover that every area of his experience may be related to the purpose of God either as discipline or responsibility. Man is often very slow to accept his responsibilities in freedom, and there are many defeats and failures involved in the process, but these are not God's failures, for if the method proceeds slowly it is due to the fact that man cannot accept all of God's truth at once, and that God is patient with his struggle. If God in His revelation were not patient with man and his failures, He would never be able to develop the

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[1] Honest Religion, p. 16.

response of freedom in man, but would make freedom impossible.

> Human freedom could no more have borne the grasp of absolute truth and absolute perfection than it can suffer the grasp of absolute mechanical law. To lay hold of man by infallible and final proclamation and dare him to disobey, would not have been to implant in him the Divine image, but as it were, to put out the fire by the blaze of the sun.[1]

Although Oman dealt with the authority of Christ under the topic of external authority, he actually stressed the same basic thesis of the internal authority which he had applied to the authority of Church and Scriptures and concentrated upon the importance of receiving the authority of Christ in freedom. Jesus is the highest authority in religion because He refused to consider himself as an external authority, but chose rather to deal directly with God's truth as it makes its appeal to man who is made in the image of God. Christ never asked men to accept the truth on any other grounds than the truth itself as its own authority. He did not base his appeal on any position or status which He possessed or upon any external support, which He might have used, but instead trusted the truth to be its own witness and bring its own confirmation. Christ's method of presenting God's truth to men, according to Oman, was therefore not primarily the proclamation of truth to be accepted, but the more existential approach of seeking to draw the truth from men, often even very sinful men, by asking their opinion on the issue under consideration.

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[1] Vision and Authority, p. 97.

> The great demonstration of the Christ is just that He never sets Himself, as the absolute external authority of the perfect truth, in opposition to the imperfect authority of the finite and sinful spirit within, but that He has only one appeal, which is to the likeness of God and the teaching of God within. Jesus speaks indeed with authority. He is not as the Scribes. They had authorities, but no authority. They had nothing to speak from direct, and nothing to appeal to direct. Jesus, on the other hand, speaks from man to man the truth He has seen and to which his hearers cannot be blind, unless they close their eyes.[1]

Christ was Himself the truth, and an authority in all that He thought, and said, and did, however, when He said "I say unto you" He did not intend to speak with an absolute finality which would forbid further investigation of the truth, but He sought to arouse an internal response in man which would give witness to the validity of God's revelation. Oman believed that it was this aspect of the authority of Christ which provided the most adequate criterion for establishing the perfect truth of God because Christ "abolishes all opposition between what God has created in us and what He reveals to us, between the authority of the conscience and the heart and the authority of the truth."[2]

The fact that Christ refused to put His words into any kind of final or authoritative written form is a significant indication of the kind of authority which he desired for his teaching. Christ left no written word of His own, even though he lived in a day when people were heavily dependent on

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[1] Vision and Authority, pp. 107-8.

[2] Ibid., pp. 112-13.

writing, and even though he taught among those who had a slavish submission to the letter. He was confident that His words would endure, but He did not seek to preserve them in any permanent form of expression. It would certainly have been possible for Him to have written his teaching in a perfect form which would have guaranteed its inerrant transmission.

> If it had been His first purpose to set all dubiety for ever aside, He might have made every word be continued to man as a royal proclamation, with an imperative authority behind it which none might doubt and few disobey. But this enslaving authority over man's mind and will He ever shunned.[1]

He was, rather, content to give Himself and His teaching to a few who would be able to understand and remember only a small portion of His truth.

It was in the cross of Christ that Oman saw the supreme example of the authority of God which chooses to deal with man in his freedom. By removing the personal enmity which exists between God and man, the cross makes it possible to avoid the conflict between the external authority of God and the internal authority of man's freedom. The cross does not just abolish an external barrier of fellowship which exists between God and man, but it is God's invitation to man to respond freely to God's grace. There is nothing in the cross of "the might which constrains, but is all of the might which persuades, nothing of the easy proclamation of power, but is all of the difficult participation of love."[2] If man is willing to unite his finite

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[1] Vision and Authority, p. 126.

[2] Ibid., p. 117.

will with the infinite will of God as revealed in the cross, he may receive the personal strength which is offered to him there, and he may realize the true and ultimate purpose of his freedom which is to accept the responsibility and the direction which God gives him. Until this personal relationship is established, there will always be a false and unnecessary division between external authority and that internal authority which a man must see for himself.

Another major division and emphasis of Oman's treatment of authority was his interpretation of the authority of the Church's creed. He made no technical distinction between the terms creed and confession, but used them interchangeably to speak of the essential doctrinal affirmations of the Church. Although he usually speaks in a negative vein of warning concerning the dangers of allowing an external creed to usurp the place of freedom in religion, he did acknowledge the value and purposes of an adequate creed or confession for apologetics, teaching, refuting error and establishing union within the Church.[1] Oman expressed concern that the Church should have a creed which was "clear and certain and imperative, adequate to man's practical necessities, a call to high endeavour, and a condemnation of all things base."[2] The Church can have this kind of creed only if it can discern the will of the Father, and the only way to

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[1] Honest Religion, pp. 161-62.

[2] Vision and Authority, pp. 181-82.

know the Father is through the revelation of the Son, who must be known and interpreted without any interference from an external authority. At this point Oman clearly reflected the influence of Ritschl, for he interpreted Ritschl as teaching that since we are brought directly into contact with God's revelation we are free, "so that no human creed can be authoritative for us. We are not even dependent upon the Fathers. Herein the very significance of Christ's person and work appears. They enable us to go behind the Fathers and all other authorities."[1] Oman's own emphasis is strikingly parallel:

> If the Christ of God is not one who proclaims truth altogether above our reasoning, but is the perfect appeal of the Divine incarnated in humanity which demonstrates itself direct to the nature made in God's image, the first resolve of every disciple in every age should be to press, without intermediary, directly to His feet. No fellow mortal, were he even an Apostle, should intervene.[2]

Oman realized that the Church's creed came through the historical development of men's witness and interpretation; however, the burden of his emphasis was to establish the fact that the ultimate or final religious authority could not reside in an historical tradition or in the witness of others.

Christ first demonstrated His truth and power to His own age before men ever sought to conserve the witness to His life in a Biblical and a historical tradition; consequently, each generation should seek to maintain

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[1] Faith and Freedom, p. 380.

[2] Vision and Authority, p. 193.

in its creed only that for which it has evidence in a new demonstration of Christ's power. When this principle is taken seriously, men realize that the basic authority of the creed does not rest upon the majority of people who accept it, or upon ecclesiastical status, but rather upon the attitude which men have toward God's truth. It has never been possible to determine truth on the basis of numbers or position, for truth is quite frequently found in the minority, and even one man may possess an interpretation of the truth which is not individualistic in that his conviction may be derived from the universal grounds of truth. Wherever this may happen, that "one Apostolic soul, though all were faithless, would be the true representative of Christ and Christ's interests in the church!" [1] The central affirmations of the Church's creed, therefore, must not be accepted on the basis of the ability of the Church to define its doctrine in massive systems, but rather upon the capacity of the Church to witness concerning that which it has experienced by its faith. The Church must accept the fact that it can "permanently and safely retain no article in her creed she is not able to demonstrate in her life." [2] Since it is impossible to confirm by experience many vague abstractions and minute descriptions of God's order which theology has often maintained, the Church must be content with a more modest creed which shall wait patiently for the day when God shall reveal Himself

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[1] Vision and Authority, pp. 211-212.

[2] Ibid., p. 220.

more completely. The Church may be quite confident that if it will accept only that which finds correlation between the revelation of God from without and the image of God within, and respond only to that which has the ability to make men more like God in their experience, that the truth of God has the power to survive and enable men to conserve and implement the basic teachings of the Christian Faith. "The Spiritual inheritance she has received she will hand on, not diminished by the wear and stress of time, but, enriched by man's varied experience and tested by helping at least to solve the problems of every age."[1]

The final major division of Oman's treatment of authority deals with his application of his interpretation of religious authority to the method and task of the Church. He believed that the proper starting point for considering this question was not to stipulate the type of authority which the Church must possess if it is to succeed in its task, but to determine the nature of the authority the Church should exercise in being true to the method of Christ. Too frequently, the Church has acted as though success must be hers at all costs, and as though her failure would reflect upon God's power. The belief that because the Church has a purpose worthy of success she must devise ways to force its victory has often been the cause of her entanglement in areas which are not properly her concern, and has often led her to resort to the use of improper means to advance her cause.

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[1]Vision and Authority, p. 256.

However, Oman was thoroughly committed to that belief in freedom which he had learned so well from Ritschl, and which he developed so fully in his doctrine of grace, that "God has made in every heart a sanctuary into which He Himself will not, with any other means, force an entrance."[1] The Church, therefore, may fail in its invitation to men, but it must learn to shake the dust off its shoes in a "sacrament of failure" and consider even its willingness to fail an essential element of the gospel.[2] The supreme example for the Church to follow in this regard is found in the revelation of the persuasive love of God as seen in the death of Christ on the cross, for it is only in the cross that man may know the power of a transforming love which will not violate his freedom. The Church should continually

> exalt the Cross as the symbol of highest rule, the fullest revelation of the Divine sovereignty. It is the sign of power, because it is the symbol of the might which shall transform all things by transforming all hearts, the symbol of the everlasting order of conscious freedom in God's rule of love.[3]

If the Church, therefore, is true to the method of Christ's appeal to men, it will seek to make its demands as strong and as weak as the cross of Christ.

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[1] Vision and Authority, p. 313. Oman's indebtedness to Ritschl on this theme may be seen in Faith and Freedom, pp. 356, 374.

[2] Vision and Authority, pp. 308f.

[3] Ibid., p. 337.

Oman recognized that the spiritual authority which he advocated would be unsatisfactory to many because it did not offer the secular force and security which the Churches once possessed. The centuries of conditioning men to expect strong temporal power from their churches is not easily removed from their minds; however, Oman declared that the foundation stone of all genuine authority in the Church "is the Peter of the common life, whose endowment is insight to perceive every revelation of God, as the ceaseless unfolding of the everlasting order in freedom through holiness and union through love."[1] It is easy to understand why men become discouraged and confused when their old external authorities are no longer tenable, but there can be no turning back for this would mean a rejection of God's method in establishing His kingdom; furthermore, Oman concluded:

> The old external authority of the Church is a halting place we have in God's wise providence long passed, and by no preaching of submission can it be found again. Safety is not behind but before, and the demand which should ever ring more loudly in our ears is to inquire more earnestly, more humbly, more patiently, more utterly in the spirit of love and with a more exclusive regard to the interests of truth. So shall we follow Him who is True and see the glory of His kingdom which is Love.[2]

Oman was certain that if the Church will dedicate itself to this end by these means, that it may be assured that though there appears to be great loss of

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[1] Vision and Authority, p. 348.

[2] Ibid., p. 352.

of authority it shall one day realize how that which is truly of God has endured. This conviction remained central to Oman's thought throughout his life, for in his last book, Honest Religion, he concluded:

> I can find no sense in life and no meaning in history on the view that God is as much concerned with correct doctrine, approved action and regulated institution as man is. To have made us all, infallible in every judgment and undeviating in every action would surely have been child's play for His omnipotence. But if the sole perfect order be the freedom of God's children, and it involve knowing God's mind of our own insight and doing His will of our own discernment and consecration and having a relation to others which is a fellowship mutual both with God and man, and, that, in the end, God will not be content with less, surely we can see, dimly at least, the necessity for the long hard way man has had to travel.[1]

The Church, however, must continually be on guard that it does not become proud or complacent for the one thing which God does not allow men is contentment with their finalities.[2]

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[1]Honest Religion, p. 169. Cf. Oman, "Christianity in a New Age," introduction to A.S. Peake and R.G. Parsons, An Outline of Christianity, Vol. III (London: Waverly Book Club, 1926), pp. xvi-xvii.

[2]Honest Religion, p. 34.

CHAPTER VII

RECONCILIATION

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Oman believed that the most distinguishing aspect of the Christian religion "is the kind of redemption it offers," for in contrast "to all ways of renunciation, its way of being redeemed from the world is reconciliation."[1] Oman developed this criterion more broadly and fully although less personally than in Grace and Personality, when he made his classification of world religions in his later work The Natural and The Supernatural on the basis "of the kind of redemption they offer."[2] He felt that the most important task for English theology in his day was to give a complete reorientation of the Christian religion according to the major theme of the reconciliation of man to God. He sought, therefore, like Schleiermacher in his age, to reinterpret Christian theology, and especially the doctrine of grace, from a thoroughly personalistic interpretation of God and man in all their relationships.[3] Oman struggled with the relationship between the human and the divine will in his first book, Vision and Authority, because he realized that there was not only something central for the Christian faith involved in the issue, but that there was in this problem the promise of an

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 111.

[2] Natural and Supernatural, pp. 363ff.

[3] Faith and Freedom, pp. 331, 328.

unending debate which each generation must interpret for itself. The basic question, according to Oman, was how is it possible for man in the weakness of his finite will to receive the aid of an absolute and infinite God without losing his freedom, and how is it possible for an almighty God to entrust His creation to sinful and erring man without forfeiting his sovereignty.

> Must not the very first necessity of His rule stand in hard contrast, alien and opposite, to the thought of a human personality of limited, but uncontrolled dominion, who has in his own choice and resolution, not merely the destinies of his own soul, but the additional responsibility of a large influence upon the happiness or misery of others? If two such dominions exist, must they not face each other, forever unreconcilable.[1]

This same basic question is a recurring theme in all of Oman's writings but it received its fullest exposition in his monumental work, Grace and Personality. It is difficult at times to see clearly some of the distinctions Oman makes between the various emphases in his interpretation of the doctrine of grace, but the basic pattern of his discussion deals with : (1) the historical setting for the problem of grace; (2) the essential nature of the gracious personal relationship between man and God; (3) the way this relationship finds expression in the Christian life; and (4) the way that the moral and religious aspects of experience are related in the gracious personal relationship.

According to Oman, the underlying problem of grace as seen in its historical setting is the same problem as that which provided the background

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[1]Vision and Authority, pp. 243-44.

for his reinterpretation of the other major themes of his theology; namely, the problem of the concept of infallibility. When the idea of infallibility is applied to an interpretation of grace, the assumption is made that grace works mechanically as an "irresistible force of omnipotence directed, in an unswerving line, by omniscience, which, being mechanical and not spiritual, introduces irreconcilable conflict between moral freedom and the succour of God."[1] Oman maintained that if grace is conceived to be a dominating force which manipulates persons as objects, there can be no personal relationship between man and God; consequently, the noblest concern of religion with persons and moral values can never be realized. He saw the problem of a mechanical interpretation of grace as essentially the same issue which took the form of the problem of free-will and predestination in the debates between Augustine and Pelagius, Calvin and Arminius, and which, in more recent days, may be observed in the conflict between the emphasis on moral self-sufficiency by Kant and the rationalists, as opposed to the importance given to religious dependence by Schleiermacher and the romanticists.

The rationalism of the eighteenth century was Pelagian in character in that its primary concern was to stress the rational capacity and the responsibility of the individual to recognize and accept the truth for himself. It taught that there can be no real worth in truth, beauty or goodness unless

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 14.

it be freely received, and that there can be no true morality if it is not accepted in absolute freedom. Most of the rationalists, according to Oman, were as naive as the earlier Pelagians had been about the ability of man to perfect himself, but their optimism, he believed, was due to the fact that they evaluated man and his attainments by the limited criterion of moralistic rules of conduct rather than in the broader scope of an attitude of growth in sincerity and conscientiousness toward the whole environment. The movement failed in its basic desire to provide a sound basis for morality, and therefore when taken by itself cannot solve the problem of the relationship between human freedom and God's will in the doctrine of grace.

The movement known as romanticism in the poetry and philosophy of the nineteenth century sought to enlarge the rather limited view of life which rationalism had imposed. It interpreted the world as a vast moving, spiritual realm and attempted to recognize in man an infinite individuality which corresponds to the manifold diversity of the world; however, it tended to interpret the individual as only an emergent element who reflected the noblest qualities in an "immanent cosmic process."[1]

Oman discerned traces of Augustinianism and Calvinism in romanticism for he declared:

> This is predestinarianism in a way to have taken away even Calvin's breath; and it gives a calm superiority to good and evil, which no doubt he would have rejected with all the intensity of his vehement spirit. But is it other than the logic of his position? If the glory of God is to act by omnipotence

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 20.

> directed in a straight line by omniscience, He could only fix the scheme of all things in an eternal process of Reason. . . . Once you begin with the Absolute and conceive it thus mechanically as force, the only peace you can arrive at is to do your best to contemplate the whole as a very marked improvement upon your own unfortunate confinement to the part.[1]

The severity of Oman's critique of Calvin and Calvinism is not altogether unwarranted, for although Calvin acknowledged that faith must involve a total response in love before it is genuine faith,[2] there were times when he was in danger of losing his theological balance between God's sovereignty and man's freedom by stressing the might of God as though it controlled the will of man impersonally. For instance, on one occasion in his Institutes, Calvin wrote in apparent approval of Augustine's picture of God directing the human will as a rider would manage his horse:

> If God rides it, he, like a sober and skillful rider, manages it in a graceful manner; stimulates its tardiness; restrains its immoderate celerity; represses its wantonness and wildness; tames its perverseness, and conducts it into the right way. But if the devil has taken possession of it, he, like a foolish and wanton rider, forces it through pathless places, hurries it into ditches, drives it down over precipices, and excites it to obstinacy and ferocity.[3]

Perhaps it was because Oman was actually so completely Calvinistic himself,

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 21.

[2] John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion translated by John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, no date) Volume I, Book III, Section ii, paragraph 8, pp. 604-05.

[3] Ibid., Volume I, Book II, section iv, paragraph 1, p. 334.

at least to the extent that he realized that everything of grace must come from God, that he recognized so clearly the dangers of a Calvinistic theology lapsing over into a mechanical or impersonal interpretation of grace.

Oman realized that it was impossible to reach a solution to the problem of grace as long as it was approached from the standpoint of either rationalism or romanticism for neither movement dealt adequately with personality. If the problem of grace is approached exclusively from the perspective of rationalism one is driven to the conclusion that the individual is a morally independent and self-sufficient power, and if only the insights of romanticism are accepted then the freedom of the individual must be surrendered to an infinite and overwhelming process. Oman admitted that both movements offered convenient mechanical theories, and he was aware that each had contributed something significant to an understanding of the problem; however, he concluded that neither theory alone could provide an answer to the question. The twentieth century must seek to answer the problems of both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by showing

> how the nature of a person is such and the grace which succours it is such that they cannot be divided, making it appear how a higher sense of responsibility is a deeper humility, and a more entire humility a more courageous responsibility, or, in other words, how absolute moral independence and absolute religious dependence are not opposites but necessarily one and indivisible.[1]

Oman was persuaded that each half of the antinomy of the problem represented an absolutely essential principle which could not be forgotten or compromised.

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 22.

He therefore rejected all solutions which either sacrificed religion to ethics, as did Pelagius, or ethics to religion, as did Augustine, or which separated them from one another or interpreted them in synergistic relation.

From the religious point of view, it is impossible to trace any good thing to human effort or human merit, for everything good must come from God's grace. If the only alternative is an interpretation of grace as an infinite force controlled by omniscience, then religion should follow Augustinianism for ultimately everything worthy of faith originates in God. It is especially necessary to hold to this conviction in view of man's weaknesses and failures, because it is apparent that nothing of any real value can have its primary source in the human realm; yet from the ethical point of view it is impossible to see any goodness in conduct that is deterministically motivated, whether by external necessity or by irresistible divine grace. The danger of Pelagianism is that it encourages men to put their trust in their own efforts and even in their own feelings. It demands an anxious exercise of religious effort in public and an introspective devotion in private, but its overall emphasis on human effort is not conducive to a genuine peace. The kind of belief which cannot depend wholly upon God must forfeit peace by its continual concern about its spiritual health, and "to be perpetually feeling our own pulse is the surest way to rob ourselves of the self-forgetting vigour in which health is displayed."[1]

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 26.

Pelagianism is also an inadequate criterion for morality because of its easy optimism concerning man's ability to reach perfection and obey God's laws. The true dynamics of morality such as sincerity and proper motivation, are obscured by a shallow concern with the mere external appearances of respectability. The very fact that Augustinianism and Calvinism were opposed by Pelagianism and Arminianism in what appeared to be an almost inescapable conflict revealed to Oman that there was something basic in man's religious experience which was not properly acknowledged by the former theories and indicated to him also that there was an element of truth in the latter interpretations. Oman explained that even the weaknesses of the reasons for Pelagianism showed how essential was the element of truth it contained, "for men are usually satisfied with bad argument only when their convictions rest on other grounds."[1]

Although Oman acknowledged the value of Augustinianism in ascribing every ultimate good in religious experience to God, he made it abundantly clear that he did not believe that God gives Himself to man as irresistible grace. The primary purpose of religion is to provide man with an eternal strength and stability in an evanescent world of mechanical forces; therefore, man should never be persuaded to accept an interpretation of God as mere impersonal and irresistible power. If God is understood to be an infinite force over against the finitude of man, there remain, according to Oman,

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[1]Grace and Personality, p. 28.

only three very unsatisfactory alternatives of interpretation: either God's power would be so overwhelming that it would annihilate man's personality altogether; or He could withhold his power and abandon man in a "parched desolation in which uninspired resolutions grow as a meagre salt bush"; or God may dispense his grace in such an arbitrary way that He would "break up the desert only by stagnant pools."[1] If it is maintained that God's infinite power cannot be resisted, then human personality is destroyed; and if the will of man is contrasted to the divine will, then morality degenerates into mere outward prohibitions and religion loses its purpose for existence. The problem seems to be so unending and so insoluble that it is vain even to consider it—but the problem is so germane to all our moral and religious experience that it cannot be escaped. The dependence of man upon God is so vital and essential for his moral and religious experience that whenever God's will is understood as irresistible force over against man's finite will, man can only interpret the two forces in juxtaposition and conflict. When this happens "our moral independence and our religious dependence become 'incensed points of mighty opposites', having nothing in common save a hostile frontier."[2]

Oman applied the experiential principle of his methodology to the amelioration of this problem when he maintained that it is impossible for one to reason a priori as though he were viewing the doctrine of grace from

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[1]Grace and Personality, p. 35.

[2]Ibid., p. 36.

God's perspective. One should rather acknowledge his limitations and seek to interpret the grace of God as he has known it in his own experience. The concept of omnipotence directed by omniscience as "irresistible violence on a predetermined scheme"[1] must be abandoned. In its place there must come an understanding and appreciation of the way God in His wisdom actually deals with man in allowing him the freedom to accept the will of God as his own choice and thereby to grow in maturity and responsibility. The grace of God does not work in any of our experiences in isolation from our total environment and this must include even our own participation in the experience. Oman summarized his conviction on this principle in a passage in Honest Religion:

> On this earth and in our experience, we never find God's power working alone in independence of all that works with it and in particular our own cooperation. We do not find unity apart from what we are led to see united, or wisdom apart from seeking guidance. But when we abstract them from earth and send them up to heaven, where our ignorance unclothes them of all relations, nothing hinders us from calling unity The One and bringing it back naked and alone to reduce all difference to illusion, to Maya. So also the foresight and provision, which we only see working amid earth's uncertainties and difficulties, we may transfer to heaven, where our ignorance sets them alone as omniscience and omnipotence and then bring them back simply as the fiat of the Absolute to explain all doings and all designs as either process or predestination.[2]

The proper starting point for an understanding of grace cannot be an a priori definition of grace, regardless of how tempting this may be,

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 36.

[2] Honest Religion, p. 28.

but it must be a consideration of the nature of the human personality which will be in relationship to the divine grace. Oman defined a moral person as a self-conscious being who is autonomous or self-directed by its own freedom.[1] He maintained that the grace of God which shall strengthen this kind of a moral being cannot be an impersonal overwhelming force, but must be of the nature of persuasive grace.

> Our dependence upon God is no more in conflict with our true moral independence than, in any other perfect personal relation, the basis of which is mutual respect, the relation, let us say, of a father to the son he would equip for finding his task by his own insight and performing it from his own fidelity.[2]

Only when all of God's dealings with man are understood along the lines of a gracious personal relationship in which He does not force His truth upon man but invites him to accept it for himself, can there be any reconciliation possible between man's absolute dependence on God and his own moral

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 40. Dr. H. H. Farmer has suggested in personal conference with the writer that perhaps Oman's basic point of departure for interpreting man's personality as the context for an understanding of grace was more directly influenced by the Biblical concept of man's nature than is admitted or emphasized in this phase of Oman's discussion. Be that as it may, there is surely a vast difference between this point of departure in Oman's thought and the approach of Karl Barth, who emphasizes first of all that man can only know himself as he is, and this means as a sinner, only in the light of God's revelation and grace.

Karl Barth, op. cit., Volume IV, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Section I, pp. 391f.

[2] Grace and Personality, p. 65.

independence and responsibility.

Since God has chosen to deal with man in a personal relationship, the doctrine of salvation must, therefore, be interpreted primarily as a gracious invitation for man to respond in his own spiritual recognition to the faithfulness of God. Salvation is not a magical or mystical transformation of the personality whereby God acts on man as "impersonally as bleaching powder whitening cotton;"[1] neither are men, in the words of another phrase which Oman used so frequently that his students grew weary of it, "passive buckets to be pumped into."[2] Oman declared that "true religion is so far from being necessarily succoured by any sudden and transforming experience of what Hodge describes with the Schoolmen as a material change, that to rely upon it is to expose ourselves to grave moral and spiritual dangers."[3] Salvation must rather be understood as the personal relationship

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 74.

[2] G. Stephen Brinks et al, Religion in Britain Since 1900 (London: Andrew Dakus, Ltd., 1952), p. 61.

[3] Grace and Personality, p. 70. Cf. p. 27. Oman does not note any specific passages in any of Hodge's writings, but he must have rejected his interpretation of grace on the basis of such passages as the following one where Hodge almost totally ignored the place for the freedom of acceptance of the gospel. Hodge maintained that efficacious grace was surely not of the nature of "moral suasion," declaring:

> By moral suasion is meant the influence exerted by one mind over the acts and states of another mind, by the presentation of truth and motives, by expostulations, entreaty, appeals, etc. Under the influence of this kind of moral power, the mind yields or refuses. Its decision is purely its own, and within its own power.

(continued on page 172.)

of a man with God which is not basically mystical or moral in nature but primarily religious. In other words, it is essentially a personal commitment to God who has revealed Himself to man in all His relationships as One who can be trusted. Oman warned that when this doctrine is taken seriously there will be the loss of any justification for the special administration of grace as a "sort of love-philtre" which can only be effectively administered by special persons, for if salvation is truly personal, it means that God must be Father in every area of experience and not only in some sacred realm or channel. Moreover, the whole structure of the world is involved in our understanding of salvation as personal because the genuineness and validity of our faith must be determined by the way in which religious experiences are related to the whole world and confirmed in daily life.[1]

As was pointed out earlier, it is difficult at times to see clearly some of the distinctions which Oman made in the application of his doctrine of grace to the various aspects of Christian experience and thought; however, in another one of his major emphases he did attempt to show how the

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(Footnote 3 continued from page 171)
There is nothing of all this in the exercise of omnipotence. Healing the sick by a word, is an essentially different process from healing him by medicine. A living man may be persuaded not to commit suicide; but a dead man cannot be persuaded into life. If regeneration be effected by the volition, the command, the almighty power of God, it certainly is not produced by a process of argument or persuasion.
Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, Volume II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885), p. 684.

[1]Grace and Personality, pp. 74-75.

gracious personal relationship is made known to and expresses itself within the Christian life. He explained that if God is not only related to man in certain sacred realms, but is personally related to him in every aspect of his experience, then the Christian life should surely be a blessed life which gives evidence of its conviction that all things everywhere contribute to God's purpose for good. In an emphasis which Oman derived from Ritschl and which he developed in his interpretation of religion, Oman maintained that Christ taught that blessedness really began with man's relationship to the world rather than with God. The reason why Christ began in this order, according to Oman, was because Christ did not want us to think of religion as mere moral precepts but as a realization that all of our relations to God are experienced first in relation to the world and to man as we deal faithfully and meaningfully with our environment. Blessedness is essentially the "acceptance of the duty God demands and acquiescence in the discipline he appoints, not as submission to the inevitable, but as the discovery that our blessedness is in God's purpose;"[1] therefore, man must take his proper place in God's world, rather than in a situation of his own making, if he is ever to be blessed.

In view of the fact that man can only be blessed as he takes his proper place in the environment in which he lives, reconciliation in its fullest sense must include not only a right relationship to God but also an

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 92.

acceptance of the realities of the world in which God places man. Oman felt that it was an artificial distinction to speak as though reality were something altogether different from God, for he believed that when one was at enmity with God he was at the same time out of harmony and relationship with the real world. A man is at enmity with God when he is in rebellion toward reality and lives as though it were his enemy. The mere profession of reconciliation is not sufficient to remedy the situation, although men frequently attempt to isolate their religion from the rest of their lives by claiming reconciliation to God while refusing to accept the situation and direction which He gives. A genuine reconciliation may be defined as a "recognition of God's gracious relation to us through blessedness in our use of the world, our dealings with our fellowmen, and our loyalty in His kingdom;"[1] consequently, one can be reconciled only when he is dedicated to finding God's purpose in every area of life, and when he is willing to submit to the discipline and accept the responsibility which God may require.

The proper way to approach an understanding of God's gracious personal relationship to men is through an adequate interpretation of faith conceived not as mere emotion, or magic, or even struggle on man's part, but as trust or commitment to the truth. Faith can be valid only when it has its origin in an object which creates a true belief about itself because

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 121.

genuine faith "is simply faith in the truth solely because it convinces us that it is true."[1] Oman almost invalidated his premise that an interpretation of grace must first consider the nature of the personality which it would strengthen when he said that true faith must be primarily concerned with the object of its faith and God's relationship to us rather than being focused upon the experience. However, his main purpose in stressing the object of faith was not to give a revelational direction to his thought, but primarily to avoid any dangers of mysticism in an interpretation of faith as emotion or mere sentiment. Oman returned to his basic point of departure in the interpretation of grace when he insisted that faith is not primarily directed toward sentimental thoughts about God, but toward the meaning of love in this world. Faith makes it possible to recognize that the real structure of the world, which determines or conditions so much of what we understand as blessedness, is constructed along the lines of purpose and love. "We believe that God is love when we can reverse it and say that love is God, that, in whatsoever weakness it may meet us, it wields the might of omnipotence," and when one discerns and acknowledges this truth for himself it may truly be said that he has faith.[2] In the depth and breadth of this kind of faith a man may be blessed in the assurance that

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 129.

[2] Ibid., p. 130.

> all the reality of which he is conscious is in his own power for good, all the ideals by which he could direct himself unerringly[1] in the midst of it are for his seeking, and all the rule of God is for him, in all conflict, a kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.[1]

If grace is truly interpreted as God's being gracious to man in all his relationships, and if it be true that faith is not a matter of magic or achievement on man's part, then how, Oman asks, can it be said that faith is not man's own doing but a gift of God, and how can there be an invitation for one to have faith, or a sin for one to refuse to believe? These questions brought Oman to the crux of the whole issue of the way in which grace makes itself known to man or in other words the manner or method that God uses to stimulate or create faith. Surely God does not give faith

> as a medicine or faith-potion, like the ancient idea of a philtre or the modern idea of an inoculation, but, as any person enables us to believe in him, by showing Himself, in all His dealings with us, entirely worthy of trust. God gives us faith by the whole witness of life, interpreted by the whole of revelation, which, for the Christian, means, in particular, life as interpreted by Jesus Christ.[2]

Oman and Karl Barth have similar emphases on this point for Barth also recognizes the spiritual way which God calls forth faith when he says :

> Knowledge of God is in obedience to God. This obedience is not that of a slave but of a child. It is not blind but seeing. It is not

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[1] An unusual word for Oman to use, but it is quite clear that he is referring to the spiritual certainty of inner experience, and not to external infallibility.

[2] Grace and Personality, pp. 130, 131.

> coerced but free. . . .Standing over against the object of his knowledge in a relationship of obedience, man acknowledges and confirms that the fulfilment of this knowledge results in binding to God's Word. . . . Moreover, this obedience itself is not only evoked [hervorgerufen, called forth, not verursacht, causally created] but also determined by this object.[1]

The difference, however, between Oman and Barth is that Barth would not be satisfied with Oman's generality concerning "life as interpreted by Jesus Christ" but would insist quite rightly on a clearer understanding of what this means in relation to Jesus Christ as the Word of God.[2]

From his position concerning the way God produces faith, Oman drew the principle that the sin of unbelief consists not in man's lack of effort to believe or defeat in the struggle with doubt, but in his unwillingness to deal sincerely with the revelation which God has given. "Sin begins with resisting the truth in unrighteousness. . . Thus it is not an act but a principle, which has as its natural outcome corrupt minds, degraded consciences and unnatural vices."[3] Man does not really have any obligation to force himself to believe anything if he has not been convinced of its truth; however, he does have the responsibility of allowing the witness the opportunity to

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[1]Barth, op. cit. Volume II, Section 1, p. 36.

[2]For the insight regarding the words hervorgerufen and verursacht, this writer is indebted to James Brown, Subject and Object in Modern Theology (London: S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 1955), pp. 164ff.

[3]Honest Religion, p. 115.

present its evidence and make its claim upon his life. This is essentially all that Christ ever asked. When He preached repentance and the acceptance of the gospel He was prepared to give convincing evidence for his message, and He only requested the opportunity to demonstrate His truth, "repentance being just the putting away of the hypocrisies which prevent the gospel from being its own evidence."[1]

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[1]Grace and Personality, p. 136. Although Oman frequently spoke of the freedom to accept or reject the witness of one's environment, he was reluctant to say much in his fully developed theological writings concerning what the rejection of God's grace might mean in an eschatological sense. However, in a sermon from Matthew 23:34 he did acknowledge that there could be a finality in man's rejection of Christ as far as this life is concerned, regardless of what eternity may have in store regarding that rejection.

> Whatever judgment on that day, whatever final rejection of a love which never can cease to pity, which can never cease to utter itself as it once did over Juersalem, there will be this sure and great calamity that in the interval all love's service is rejected and all love's glory obscured from our eyes. That result is very sure and we can see it every day of our lives. We see Christ rejected and so far as this life is concerned, so far as His present manifestation as a man of sorrows is concerned, rejected finally and utterly. For what we may find beyond of fixed destiny or further opportunity, we have no warrant in this text, but there can never be any further opportunity that can alter the fact that the heart turned from God when He came among us as one that serveth, meek and lowly of heart, bearing our sins and carrying our sorrows. What He may be or what appeal He may make when He comes in the name of the Lord cannot alter the fact, cannot make good the loss, cannot avert the judgment which must follow of itself this rejection of our highest good. . . . And henceforth the soul that finally rejects Christ's appeal, the soul He would love and help and save and which would not, goes onward into the unknown future in all time at least, without God and without hope, his house left in the end to him desolate, and no vision of a Christ who is love and to whom his love answers. That, after all, is the only judgment

(continued on page 179)

Oman emphasized a theme which is also found in contemporary neo-orthodoxy when he said that it is possible to understand how faith is the gift of God only when the integral relationship between revelation and reconciliation is perceived. The reconciliation between man and God in personal relationship can be brought about only when God reveals His grace toward man and when man responds to the revelation by being reconciled to God. Oman described the revelatory and reconciling work of Christ in concepts that are decidedly Schleiermacherian and Ritschlian in character when he said:

> If there were One whose absolutely right relation to God manifested adequately God's relation to us, even that line would become only a preparation for His task, and He would be an ultimate revelation, not in the sense of being a substitute for our own insight or of exhausting the whole meaning of experience, but as the inspiration of our insight and the pioneer of our experience.[1]

The nearest which Oman ever came to providing an adequate Christological orientation for his interpretation of revelation was when he explained that Christ is the highest revelation of God because He is the ultimate reconciliation whose finality is not based on any external criterion of truth but upon "the embodiment of a relation to the Father, the perfection of which we

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(footnote continued from page 178)
that can matter much, the only condemnation from which love itself cannot save us, that we have seen the light and reject it because we are not of it, that we hear the appeal of love and answer it with hatred.
Oman, "Tenderness and Judgment," in Dialogue With God, pp. 115-16.

[1]Grace and Personality, p. 158.

prove only as we use it to interpret His relation to us in all things and at all times."[1] The basic purpose of revelation, however, according to Oman, is not to reveal to man the truth and unity of God as though it were telling him some new truth about God. It is rather to reconcile the disunity between man and God so that man will be united within himself and may have a true vision and understanding of God. The inseparable relationship between revelation and reconciliation which exists between personal moral beings in a universe which is structured along personal moral lines means in essence that the grace of God "is nothing else than the succour of our moral personality into the liberty of the children of God, a succour which we may sum up by saying that faith is the gift of God by the whole of experience, interpreted by the whole of Christianity."[2] There is a striking contrast between Oman's emphasis and the doctrine of revelation as reconciliation which is offered by Karl Barth, who places a solid emphasis on revelation as an event of Christ's accomplishment which makes reconciliation possible, and who leaves no doubt concerning the place and importance of the person of Christ in that revelation and reconciliation. Barth says that the work of Christ is an event of miracle in the midst of a darkened human order which may be called revelation or reconciliation,[3] and he insists that

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 158.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Barth, op. cit., Volume I, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Section 1, p. 470.

there can be no ambiguity allowed concerning the essential deity of the One who is to accomplish the event of God's revelation and reconciliation.[1]

In the final major emphasis of Oman's interpretation of the gracious personal relationship, he attempted to show how the moral and religious aspects of experience are related in the Christian life.[2] He reiterated his basic conviction that there could be no mechanical or impersonal answer to the problem and affirmed that there should be no antagonism between the two realms if they were understood to be related in personal union. God's gracious personal relationship expresses itself in the Christian experience of reconciliation by giving man the strength to realize the true freedom of a child of God. The moral and religious aspects of this experience are not isolated from one another but mutually interdependent. Christian experience is moral in nature because it is genuinely religious, and likewise it is religious in character because it is essentially moral. The grace of God is indeed gracious in that while it is given to strengthen man's moral life, it is not granted on the basis of any moral quality or possession on man's part. Grace would be destroyed if it were allotted to man according to his

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[1]Barth, op. cit., Volume I, Section 1, p. 470.

[2]Oman felt that English philosophy had glossed over the problem of independence in morals, dependence in religion, and the relationship between the two "because it usually assumes that its business is to reduce religion to philosophy." He believed that this practice was as "absurd as to reduce the visible world to what you can prove to be metaphysically necessary."

John Oman, Review of Sir Henry Jones' A Faith that Inquires, Journal of Theological Studies (Vol. XXIV, 1923), pp. 214-17.

moral accomplishments; therefore, God has only one prerequisite for the reception of His grace, and that is repentance. Oman defined repentance as a sincere and moral willingness to accept ourselves and our moral world "apart from the hypocrisy which refracts our vision till we can esteem our privileges, however misused , as requiring even the God who gave them to regard us with approbation."[1] Unless there is genuine repentance there can be no blessedness over all of life for this would mean that the moral demands of one's whole environment had been ignored. Repentance, therefore, cannot be considered as merely a condition or a threshold of faith because it is inseparable from that right dealing with reality which is faith. There can be no priority of value or antecedent in time concerning repentance and faith because they are so completely one in the unity of moral experience. One must know that God has offered Himself in a gracious personal relationship before he can repent properly, and he must sincerely repent by responding honestly to God's witness concerning Himself before he can ever really understand His grace. The vital and inseparable relationship between repentance and faith was supremely illustrated by the way in which Christ enabled men to recognize the unpleasant moral realities of their lives without overwhelming them with defeat. He helped men to realize the grace of God which would not only make them conscious of their sin but also forgive and set before them the possibilities of what could be accomplished with God's strength.

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[1]Grace and Personality, p. 193.

The very fact that God's grace is not determined or dependent on moral effort but is at the same time vitally interested in and related to moral achievement presents man with the continual temptation of dealing dishonestly with his sin. There is the danger that either he will accept God's grace too lightly and thus avoid the moral responsibility that is rightly his, or that he will misunderstand the role of his obligation and become involved in self-righteousness. If this dilemma is not resolved there can never be the proper balance and union between man's responsibility in morals and his total reliance on God in religion. The recurring pattern of self-righteousness and rationalization cannot be broken by a mere lowering of God's standards, nor by a theoretical synergistic interpretation of the combination of God's grace and man's will, nor by an easy transference of responsibility, and surely not by a light condoning of sin. The problem must be approached by an honest dealing with moral realities. God's grace demands that man have the honesty and the integrity to evaluate himself and his world as they really are, and it is the purpose of God's grace in justification to grant man the discernment and the courage to deal with himself and his moral condition not by an insincere legalistic consistry but by a realism which can provide genuine peace. If justification were merely a matter of legalistic semantics, it would be utterly helpless to deal with man's sin and hypocrisy and could offer only an uneasy peace made possible by spiritual dullness, but it is the express purpose of justification to deliver man from just such a misconception because "grace sets right our

legal relation to God, but only by making it cease to be legal."[1] Man can be relieved of the mechanical and impersonal implications of a legalistic interpretation of grace when he understands the true meaning of justification by faith.

> We are justified because by faith we enter the world of a gracious God, out of which the old hard legal requirements, with the old hard boundaries of our personality and the old self-regarding claim of rights, have disappeared, a world which is the household of our Father where order and power and ultimate reality are of love and not of law.[2]

Justification by faith does not mean that there is some unique quality of value in the mind of man which God has decreed to accept as worthy of His grace. It means, rather, that man has perceived a true insight into the mind of God. Man is justified, therefore, not by his own faith or by faith per se but by the reality of the spiritual world of God's grace in which one places his faith.

Justification is not a mere decree of God that a sinner may be forgiven as though the father had written to the prodigal to assure him that the past would not be mentioned, for the sins of the past are not that easily dismissed. The forgiveness of God is, however, made possible through an affirmation and exhibition of love which shall bring its own victory from the past and create its own conditions of peace.

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 204.

[2] Ibid., p. 206.

> The Father must say by His whole bearing towards us, My son, let us share the sorrow and live down the shame together. And that is the meaning of the Cross. It works peace, not as an isolated event in the history of the world, but because it is the supreme manifestation of a redeeming love which works every day and in every event of every day. It is the high alter of sacrifice because it shows that the whole world is its temple.[1]

"The essential feature of Christianity is that in Christ God is reconciling the world to Himself, and that the Christian morality flows from this as the natural behavior of the household of the Father."[2] It is on this very theme of justification as personal forgiveness from the Father that Oman receives perhaps his severest criticism at the hands of a contemporary interpreter. Vincent Taylor declares of Oman's interpretation of justification:

> All this is very truly and beautifully expressed, but is it justification by faith? What has happened to the idea of faith related to the redeeming work of God in Christ, by reason of which God brings us into right relations with Himself? In truth, it has disappeared, lost in the smoke of successive broadsides upon the evils of 'the legal principle'. . . . The truth is that in this description the language of justification is retained, but its substance is lost. What is set forth is forgiveness in the sense of reconciliation; the references to justification are decorative embroidery.[3]

Oman deserves Taylor's criticism in this regard for he did fail to distinguish adequately between the Biblical terms involved and to give sufficient emphasis to Christ's accomplishment in atonement. In all fairness, however, it

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[1] Grace and Personality, pp. 209-210.

[2] John Oman, Review of W. Morgan's The Nature and Right of Religion, Journal of Theological Studies (Vol. XXVIII, 1927), p. 430.

[3] Vincent Taylor, Forgiveness and Reconciliation (London: Macmillan, 1948), pp. 64-65.

should be said that Oman did not intend to ignore the objective character of Christ's work in redemption. Even though Oman's basic emphasis fell upon Christ's work as an example of God's love along the lines of the moral influence theory of the atonement, he apparently intended to do full justice to the objectivity of atonement for on one occasion he very strongly rejected Hastings Rashdall's moralistic generalities concerning the atonement as completely unsatisfactory. Oman admitted his conviction that "neither the honest blundering of Dr. Dale, nor the passionate scholarship of Dr. Denney, nor the super subtlety of Dr. Forsyth, nor the refined elusiveness of Dr. Moberly," could give reality to the penal theory of atonement; however, he went on to declare:

> Nevertheless, one has a feeling that all these writers are reaching out after some spiritual need with which Dr. Rashdall is untroubled, not because he has solved the problem, but because he has ignored it. . . when one compares him with St. Paul, or even with Luther, one realizes how little he cares to live in the half lights, and how all the really creative souls have had to live there all their time.[1]

The overall impression of Oman's interpretation remains, however, that God's justification is made available to man primarily because the cross of Christ is the supreme example of the love of God.

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[1]Oman's review of Hastings Rashdall's The Idea of the Atonement in Christian Theology, Journal of Theological Studies (Vol. XXI, April, 1920), p. 270.

Oman confessed that the problem of how justification actually "justifies" is complicated by the fact that the consequences of sin are not automatically removed, nor are those anxious fears of guilt which produce so much moral rationalization immediately allayed the moment forgiveness takes place. He sought to deal realistically with the actual situation by admitting that even forgiveness can not alter the events of the past as though they had never happened, nor can it compensate for the loss of time and opportunity which may have been caused from past sins. Man has been given an awareness of the past and the consequences of his actions for the purpose of encouraging him to live meaningfully and responsibly toward God and himself and others; therefore, forgiveness cannot avoid this historical and corporate dimension of responsibility. Forgiveness must instead deepen and intensify man's understanding of the consequences of sin; moreover, the very attempt to avoid the spiritual pain which comes from an awareness of the results of sin may mean that the forgiveness of God has not been properly received. The first thing which grace does with the consequences of sin is to give man the strength to acknowledge and deal with them realistically by allowing them to provide the setting for much of his present responsibility. The sharing of one another's failures and burdens in a common redemptive task will help one to see that the whole course of life can be directed toward the removal or healing of the effects of sin. Justification, therefore, does not mean that the moral order of God has been suspended and the results of sin glossed over, but

it means that reconciliation to God must take place right in the midst of sin and its consequences, and that God has given assurance of the defeat of sin, and of the strength whereby its consequences may be transcended.

Man must continually be reminded that he has responsibility and moral value only because God has placed value upon him, and he may develop only to the extent that God is personally related to him and directing him toward a fuller realization of His purposes. The will of God is the sole criterion and goal of man's moral responsibility and moral achievement must remain of secondary concern. Since God has willed salvation for man and provided for it by His love, salvation itself should not be man's first objective, but the doing of the will of God. Only as men have confidence in the will of God and cease to be occupied with the securing of their own salvation can they be relieved of the anxiety of self-concern and give themselves wholeheartedly to the primary calling of doing the will of God. Oman stressed a familiar theme of his when he maintained that the will of God can be an effective directive in our lives only when it has been freely and personally accepted as our own discernment and intention. He touched upon an area not nearly so clearly amplified when he said that the will of God must be interpreted in its true perspective with regard to the Christian community because the will of God is not an exclusively individual matter. Oman's thought is so predominantly concerned with the role of the individual in religion that one could wish for more development

of this aspect of his thought. He did make clear his belief that tremendous encouragement and insight could be derived from association with followers of the will of God in the past and in the present, who comprise the Communion of the Saints.

> God's will of love cannot be known apart from those who have discerned its guidance and cherished its fellowship, yet we cannot know it either by copying their example or by being absorbed into their company, but only by realising our own freedom in the midst of it.[1]

Having thus made a good beginning on a much needed emphasis in his thought, Oman reverted rather abruptly to his characteristic way of dealing with the wider social aspects of a question by proceeding to describe the wrong ways of being dependent on the Communion of the Saints, namely, the way of tradition and mysticism, with very little positive conclusion concerning the right way by which one may participate in the heritage of the Saints and benefit from their community.[2]

Oman avoided an existential solipsism in his interpretation of the Kingdom of God when he admitted that the Kingdom exists objectively and externally apart from man's acceptance of it and might even in an ultimate sense be considered as the only reality which truly exists; yet he emphasized that the kingdom of God has a functional and existential relevance only when it is personally and individually accepted. Oman

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 246.

[2] Ibid., pp. 246ff.

sought to base his interpretation of the Kingdom on the prophetic concept of the Kingdom of God which, according to his understanding, was basically ethical in approach rather than speculative. Through their struggle and conflict with evil in their world the prophets gained an understanding of the ultimate nature of reality and were able to come, even as those who follow them must come, to the discovery that though the kingdom of God appears to be limited in scope and power, it is actually victorious over all realms; that the Kingdom is not mere beneficence but essentially personal love ; and that it is not even the balancing power of justice but an atoning realm of responsibility and even suffering.[1] These conclusions may be summarized around the basic principle that the Kingdom of God is a "moral rule only to be introduced by moral means";[2] however, this does not mean that the Kingdom is a shallow moral accomplishment on man's part but that it involves man's total moral response to God's realm of love.[3] When this truth has been allowed to permeate every area of the moral life then it will be realized that the world is not really a failure in God's plan, because the Kingdom of God is not like a mechanical law or force, but is the love of God which even permits its own limitation and rejection due to its

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[1] Grace and Personality, pp. 263, 269.

[2] Ibid., p. 272.

[3] Ibid., p. 282.

respect for human personality and freedom.[1]

Oman believed that the requirement which the moral order places upon man to accept the will of God and His Kingdom in spite of all the apparent defeats and contradictions in this life provides an important insight for a proper understanding of eternal life. He followed a Kantian line of reasoning when he based his argument for the existence of an eternal life on the conviction that it is possible to say that all of life's experiences, both good and evil, are subsumed in an overall purpose for good only if it is also possible to affirm that life may not be extinguished before the accomplishment of that purpose. Men can live purposefully in the difficulties of this life because they are confident that the purpose of God for their lives reaches into eternity. An understanding of eternal life must begin with the realization of a blessedness in this life which is able to overcome the

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[1]There is very little of the element of crisis or judgment in Oman's interpretation of the Kingdom of God, but he did at least acknowledge that there was this aspect in the Kingdom in a review of Rashdall's The Idea of the Atonement in Christian Theology, when he said: "A kingdom which is a crisis, into which the publicans and harlots go before the respectable religious people, does set something above moral progress, some change of relation to God while we were yet sinners, of a transforming kind." Oman was here, however, more concerned to reject Rashdall's moralistic theory of the atonement than he was in developing the positive aspects of crisis and judgment in the kingdom of Christ in his own interpretation.

Oman's review of Rashdall's The Idea of the Atonement in Christian Theology, loc. cit.

fear of death and bring its own confirmation of eternal life. Religion, therefore, should be primarily concerned, not to prove the existence of an eternal life, but to offer a way whereby man may be reconciled to God in this life. Oman warned, however, that our motivation for being reconciled to God in this life should not be the promise of an eternal life, but that we should be reconciled to God in this life because we have discovered a pattern of meaning and purpose in this life which refuses to be confined to this world.

> We are reconciled to God by finding in our present life, and not merely hoping for it in another, that God's real meaning is a rule of love, by accepting which we discover an eternal purpose, for the realisation of which every event is working. Being no less than the infinite goal of holy love, it can give us nothing less than the assurance of eternal approximation to itself; and as that is the goal, of which every appointment for use of discipline and duty, being of God's love, gives us assurance, we have a life blessed in a hope which is eternally fulfilling itself. Thus we rightly and religiously believe in another life, because we are serving the purpose of a love for which this life is too small.[1]

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[1] Grace and Personality, pp. 290-91.

Kant declared that the will of man cannot possibly correspond completely with the moral law during the limitations of human existence; however, the fact that man is obligated to seek the summum bonum as directed by the moral law can have meaning

> only in an endless progress to that complete fitness.
>
> This infinite progress is possible, however, only under the presupposition of an infinitely enduring existence and personality of the same rational being. . . . Thus the highest good is practically possible only on the supposition of the immortality of the soul.

Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason translated by Lewis White Beck (Chicago: University Press, 1949), Part I, Book II, Ch. 2, paragraph 4, pp. 225-26.

Oman summarized his interpretation of eternal life, and indeed the major thesis of his doctrine of reconciliation, when he concluded that eternal life is not an isolated gift of God apart from our moral responsibility because this would defeat morals in the interest of religion, nor can it be the reward of human achievement because this would sacrifice religion to morals; however, when eternal life is received by accepting God's grace in a personal relationship there is provided "a right relation to ourselves, to our neighbours, and to God, and, therefore, an adequate moral subject, an adequate moral sphere, and an adequate moral order."[1]

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[1]Grace and Personality, pp. 292f.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHURCH

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Oman's doctrine of the Church is an appropriate and consistent amplification of his basic personalistic theology which insisted on the freedom of the individual to accept God's will and then freely unite himself in fellowship with others who have received the same Divine order of love. In Oman's interpretation of the Church there is very little that is really new or unique which he does not stress in some way in his interpretation of freedom, authority, or grace; therefore, a discuss on of his doctrine of the Church may serve as a summary presentation of the manner in which the major emphases of his theology are related and applied specifically to an understanding of the Church. Oman sought to be true to his own principle of comprehensiveness or wholeness when he interpreted his doctrine of the Church in the broad context of the social struggle of his day. He realized that his suggestion that the Church was significant for the modern world would be considered irrelevent by many in his generation, for to them the basic social issue of the day was the conflict between a competitive individualism and a legalistic socialism. What difference could it make to them about the nature of the Church and one's relation or lack of relation to it, or, for that matter, whether the Church even exists or not? Oman answered by affirming his conviction concerning the relevance of the Church to the

problems of society because he believed that the freedom of the social order must be based upon the willingness of men to submit their human forms of power and organization to the direction and authority of the personal realm of love. Unless this surrender is made, might will rule over all human life and freedom, and social struggle will amount to little more than an occasional difference in the manifestation of power. The kind of love and freedom which is necessary as a foundation for a free society, whether individualistic or collective, is best exemplified, according to Oman, by a prophetic remnant in the Church.

> In some order of love and freedom, that is in some kind of Church, the historical struggle of mankind must be gathered up, and, if it is not being served by the present Churches, then a supreme effort should be made to recall them to their true task.[1]

In spite of all the weaknesses of the Churches and their involvement in the same aims and ambitions and methods as the world "they all contain elements of self-sacrifice not to be found elsewhere; and except by self-sacrifice no social salvation will ever be won."[2] Oman's basic point of departure for his doctrine of the Church surely has a poignant relevance for the present situation for individualism and collectivism are probably in sharper conflict today than Oman ever imagined possible. Even though he did not very fully articulate the political and social implications of the

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[1] Church and Divine Order, pp. vii.

[2] Ibid.

doctrine of the Church, his basic emphasis on the Church as the greatest practical source for freedom in society is as urgently needed today as it was in Oman's day. The political, social, and economic realms remain, and are destined to remain, incapable within themselves of producing a society and providing a motivation for the fullest expression and realization of man's freedom.

Oman ventured to give his own approach to the doctrine of the Church in his day, even though he realized that the matter had received very careful and scholarly attention throughout many centuries, because there was in his generation a renewed consideration of the differences and affinities between the various denominations within Christianity. Oman set forth a very sound Biblical principle when he stressed that his age needed to realize "that no good can be accomplished till we recognize that our differences do not concern the Church but the doctrines of God and of salvation upon which our views of the Church rest."[1] There could be little value in

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[1] Church and Divine Order, p. 3. It is clear in the phrases used to describe the Church in the New Testament that the early Christians considered their theology and their soteriology as the basis for their understanding of ecclesiology. The ecclesia is called the Church "of the Lord " or "of God," Acts 20:28, I Cor. 1:2, 10:32, 11:22, 15:9, Gal. 1:13, I Tim. 3:5, 15; Church "of Christ," Gal. 1:22; "Churches of God in Christ Jesus," Rom. 16:16, II Thess. 2:14. The doctrine of the Church is derived not only from who God is but from what He has done for men in salvation through Christ. For example, Paul writes: "To the Church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus. . . " I Cor. 1:2.

debating the comparative weaknesses or merits of individual Churches, for the ultimate issue must be the theological question of the nature of God and the salvation which He offers. Oman had no illusion that his generation, any more than others before him, would be able to maintain a Church according to the Divine order which would not become entangled in the legalism of the world. He was, nevertheless, convinced that the era in which he lived offered an unparalleled opportunity and challenge for a reconstruction of the doctrine of the Church which would conform more closely to Christ's ideal. "Never was there an age which brought men so unavoidably to the issue that the basis of the Church is freedom, not authority, individual faith, not organised constraint, prophetic hope, not priestly tradition."[1]

Oman believed that the doctrine of the Church which was prevalent in his day, and especially the actual historical and ecclesiastical context of the Church, had been largely produced by the development of the concept of freedom, primarily along two lines: rationalism and evangelicalism. Rationalism took an axiom of the Christian religion—"that the religious life is just the ordinary life properly lived"[2]—and related it so comprehensively and convincingly to the realm of society and ethical responsibility that men began to believe that the Church with all its failures and divisions was not really relevant to their world. On the other hand, the evangelical

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[1] Church and Divine Order, p. 290.

[2] Ibid., p. 293.

movement began with a genuine spirit of dedication and sacrifice, but, according to Oman, it eventually degenerated into a wealthy organizational movement which tended to lose its compassion and to interpret religion in terms of a negative moralistic Pharisaism. Eventually rationalism and evangelicalism began to have their effect on one another and their influences gradually combined to show, for one thing, that there can be no religious progress where religion is conceived as mere moral principles, even though they may be universally accepted. Rationalism learned anew that genuine religion cannot exist "where everything is undenied and undeniable, but in the vision of things unrealised and by human means unrealisable."[1] At the same time, evangelicalism learned the futility of a shallow emotionalism and realized that it must find its proper perspective in historical continuity and a more universal concern and approach toward life. Oman described the situation of the Church in his day in the following way:

> The old Evangelical impulse is fading, and many are mainly conscious that our emotions are dull, our aims divided, and our spirits dwelling apart. That feeling was mainly responsible for the return of a large section of the Church of England to the idea of the Church as one continuous external organisation. The power of this revival lay in the need of a protest against the conception of the Church as a congeries of rival associations, of competitive religious clubs. It has forced upon us the questions of the idea of the Church, its true unity, its historic task.[2]

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[1] Church and Divine Order, p. 295.

[2] Ibid., p. 296.

Consequently, these basic questions—(1) the idea of the Church, (2) its true unity, and (3) its historic task—are the major divisions of emphasis in Oman's discussion of the Church.

As it has already been pointed out, Oman believed that the doctrine of the Church was basically a theological concept which was derived from one's interpretation of God and the nature of salvation. He explained this thesis by discussing at some length an illustration used by Vernon Staley which interpreted the Church as a "covenanted sphere" of God's grace.[1] Staley had suggested that if a wealthy man wanted to provide a continuing grant of money to help those who were sick and suffering, there were essentially two methods open to him. He could either accept anyone who came to his house and try to aid them, or he could endow a hospital to fulfill his purpose. If he chose the latter procedure, then everyone would understand that to receive the benefits which were offered to them, they must go to the hospital which had been provided. This particular institution would thus become the "covenanted sphere" of the rich man's benevolence and it would be unreasonable and ungrateful for anyone to expect his generosity to be available to him in the same fullness in any other place. Oman made his own theological application of the analogy by insisting that the basic question is really whether God deals with man according to the pattern of exclusiveness which the rich man followed or whether God extends his grace more

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[1] Oman's treatment of the illustration is given in Church and Divine Order, p. 297f. The illustration is in Vernon Staley, Plain Words on the Holy Catholic Church (1891), p. 3.

throughout all of His relations with man than the illustration allowed. God has not limited his aid to any one institution, and he has not even demanded that men first approach Him, but He has by every providential and gracious means available to Him continually taken the initiative in seeking to reconcile man to Himself; therefore, any interpretation of the Church along the lines of institutional exclusiveness cannot do justice to a proper theological understanding of God's nature. Every human interpretation of God will have its imperfections because men are not capable of comprehending the full depth of God's love and grace, and when it is realized that this is the reason for many of the inadequacies of our knowledge about God it will then be possible to understand that

> the particular road by which His child returns will not matter to Him, and that every Church by which the publican and the harlot enter the kingdom of God will be a true Church, and that it may exist wheresoever Christian faith and fellowship exist, wheresoever two or three are gathered in the name of Christ.[1]

Oman continued to use Staley's illustration as a point of departure for his own theological position when he developed the other aspect of his thesis that the doctrine of the Church should not only conform to an adequate interpretation of God, but that it should also be compatible with a proper view of the way God provides salvation. In an emphasis which was more fully developed in his doctrine of grace, he observed that if the hospital is a true analogy of the Church then it might be concluded that salvation could be administered

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[1]Church and Divine Order, pp. 298-99.

quite impersonally like medicine, and any intelligent person would know to purchase his medicine only at an authorized place. Oman suggested that it is often the "sensible person" who has perverted the concept of salvation by failing to realize that salvation must involve the discovery of true freedom by a total surrender to the will of God in every area of life and not just in the realm of the understanding. True repentance requires an absolute sincerity in all things and any attempt to relegate the working or efficacy of God's grace to an exclusive institutional or sacramental realm will not do justice to the breadth of the personal dimensions inherent in salvation.

> For that salvation the only adequate sacrament is the whole of life. The Church's observances can only be the symbols and seals and interpretations which show us that all things, if need be the eating of husks, work together for good, when we have found the key to life in loving God.[1]

Yet another example of Oman's conviction that much of the obscurity concerning the doctrine of the Church arises from an inadequate concept of grace may be seen in Grace and Personality, where he pointed out that most Churches attempt to integrate conflicting interpretations of grace in their teaching and practice. Some Churches profess to believe that an understanding of the Bible can come only by means of spiritual perception, but they also hold quite inconsistently that the Church exists on the basis of the very tangible reality of historical priestly succession. In others, the theological position may be accepted that salvation depends solely on God, but actually

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[1] Church and Divine Order, p. 300.

they appear to accept the overwhelming responsibility of creating it themselves. It was Oman's belief that in some instances Churches which gave every outward indication of being quite divergent from one another frequently had in reality a basic affinity in their essential structure. For example, "the extremest Catholicism and the extremest Evangelicalism"[1] are, in spite of all their differences in externals, very closely related to one another in their interpretation of grace as a mechanical work of infinite force. Oman characterized both Catholicism and Evangelicalism in a rare passage which lacked his usual warmth and charity in dealing with those who held positions other than his own when he declared:

> They are not simply societies of those who have understood God's gracious mind towards all His children, and who have come together for the express purpose of helping others to understand that God has to them also the same mind, and of welcoming all who understand to join them in their task, but they are organisations of persons who, through special operations of omnipotence, have a special relation to God, the possession of which by newcomers must be investigated.[2]

J. K. Mozley objected to this comparison of Catholicism and Evangelicalism by reminding Oman that Catholicism's doctrine of grace is not based on the arbitrary omnipotence of God, but upon the perfect moral nature of God; and that Catholicism certainly desires to interpret grace in the light of man's whole experience with the world about him; furthermore, he explained:

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[1] Grace and Personality, pp. 163, 164.

[2] Ibid., p. 165.

> Whatever language be used, the Incarnation is a special channel of God's graciousness, and the religion sprung from belief in it reflects that fact in ways which do not at all impair the truth that all experience is usable for the knowledge of God and for fellowship with Him.[1]

Mozley touches on a very sensitive point in Oman's theology, for Oman did not adequately deal with the Christological distinctiveness of either Christ or His Church as a special channel for God's grace; however, the real emphasis which Oman is attempting to make does not concern the Incarnation but the impersonal way in which radical sacramentalism interprets the means by which grace is available to men and Oman's emphasis in this regard is justified.

The essential nature of the Church, according to Oman, is to be understood primarily as a fellowship of Christian believers who are associated together under the authority of the Spirit of God. The Church should not be conceived as a corporation or an institution for it is "the fellowship of faith which is the pillar and ground of truth."[2] The members of the Church are bound to one another not by legal contracts and external ecclesiastical compulsion but by the unifying power of the Spirit of God in their lives. Those who have known God's personal reconciliation have the responsibility to judge all things for themselves and should never surrender to

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[1] John Kenneth Mozley, "Grace and Freedom," in Essays, Catholic and Critical, ed. Edward Gordon Selwyn (London: SPCK, 1929), p. 244.

[2] Concerning the Ministry, p. 14.

another in matters of spiritual discernment.[1] To clarify this principle, Oman compared Protestantism to Catholicism. He explained that there could not be an oversimplified contrast between these Churches as though Protestantism were only a fellowship and Catholicism were only an institution. Although there are elements of fellowship and institution in both, it is possible to make a vital distinction between them on the basis of their controlling concept. In Catholicism the dominating interpretative and functional motif lies in the priestly and institutional order of the Church, whereas in Protestantism the essence may be found "in the fellowship, in all that is involved in the two or three met in the name of Christ, in the succession of believers, in the bond of love."[2] Oman warned Protestantism, in an emphasis which he acknowledged he had received from Rudolf Sohm, that it must continually be on guard that the concept of the Church as a fellowship is not too easily conceded or taken for granted because

> the natural man is always a Catholic, and that does not cease to be true though he call himself a Protestant. He still likes material guarantees, and would rather not trust anything to God that can be managed by man. . . . an institution with official rule seems a better security than a fellowship with Divine gifts.[3]

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[1] Church and Divine Order, p. 59.

[2] Ibid., p. 207.

[3] "Church," Encylopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Volume III. Ed. James Hastings. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), p. 622. Cf. Church and Divine Order, especially p. 111, also pp. 88-98, p. 150.
(continued on page 206.)

The fact that there is frequent reference to Rudolf Sohm in Oman's doctrine of the Church, along with the noticeable kinship between their emphases, makes it fairly safe to assume that he was indebted to Sohm for his distrust of the external guarantees offered by Catholicism.

(Footnote 3 continued from page 205)

R. Sohm (Kirkenrecht i. 18, i. 455). Sohm expressed his position in the following passage which runs the gamut of many of Oman's convictions concerning the dangers of an external authority, and which reveals the basic affinity in the thought of the two men.

> The natural man desires to remain under law. He strives against the freedom of the Gospel, and he longs with all his strength for a religion of law and statute. He longs for some legally appointed service, in the performance of which he may exhaust his duty towards God, and so for the rest of his time be free for the service of the world, free from that 'reasonable service,' the presenting of his whole life as a sacrifice to God. He longs for a legally appointed Church, for a kingdom of Christ which may be seen with the eyes of the natural man, for a temple of God, built with earthly gold and precious stones, that shall take the heart captive through outward sanctities, traditional ceremonies, gorgeous vestments, and a ritual that tunes the soul to the right pitch of devotion. Before all, he longs for an impressive, authoritative constitution, one that shall overpower the senses, and rule the world, a wonderful constitution whose fabric shall rise upward and reach outward far and wide. He desires, as the key-stone of the whole, a fixed body of doctrine that shall give certain intelligence, concerning all divine mysteries, presented to him in a literal form, giving an answer to every possible question. Christ walked on the sea: man would do so likewise. Alas, he sinks! He desires a rock which his eyes can see—the visible Church, the visible Word of God. Everything must be made visible, so that he may grasp it. From these impulses of the natural man, born at once of his longing for the gospel and his despair of attaining to it, Catholicism has arisen. Herein lies the secret of the enormous power it has had over the masses who are 'babes'; it satisfies these cravings. The natural man is a born Catholic.
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> Rudolf Sohm, Outlines of Church History (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1931), p. 35.

The concept of the Church as a spiritual fellowship of believers was discussed by Oman along the lines of the distinction made by the Reformers between a visible and an invisible Church. He was willing to consider the Church invisible if by that term it was meant that God is the only one who can distinguish between those who really believe and the ones who merely profess to believe. The fact that God alone can determine the true believers relieves the Church of much of its embarrassment and responsibility concerning the presence of the hypocrite and the actual unbeliever in its membership, for even though they surely do not contribute to the spiritual welfare of the fellowship, they do not really have the power to defeat its purpose. Since it is impossible for the Church itself to succeed in separating the believer from the unbeliever, it must be content to embrace every member of the visible Church in what Oman termed "the judgment of charity." Nevertheless, it is the spiritual minority whose fellowship truly exists in Christ "who are in principle the Church, and who alone are rightly described as the Catholic, the Universal Church."[1] Oman believed that the essence of the Church was a spiritual fellowship composed of "congregations of faithful", where men believe, and where the Word of God is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered. Even though men do not have the discernment or the ability to restrict its membership to these who genuinely believe, the Church is none the less in essence and strength composed only

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[1] Church and Divine Order, p. 209.

of those who have received God's forgiveness and reconciliation through their personal Christian experience and who participate in a true fellowship of faith.[1]

Oman's interpretation of the Church as a fellowship of believers also quite naturally involved the question of the nature of the Church's organization. He maintained that when Jesus began the Church He did not determine any organizational structure as essential for the Church. Oman held this position because he believed that there was no reliable Biblical evidence that Christ proposed founding an organization; Christ's relationship to Israel would also have made it inadvisable; and His eschatology was not really compatible with the idea of an established institution.[2] When Christ established the Church He did not intend "the creation of an organization with rulers and subjects", but the creating of a community which would not allow any man to impose his will on another.[3] Men should live humbly with one another and not call anyone Rabbi because this implies that a human authority may come between man and God. The Church should be a company of believers whose only instructor is God, and whose sole concern is to love the Heavenly Father and thus truly discover and serve one's brother. The spirit of

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[1] John Oman, "The Presbyterian Churches," Evangelical Christianity, Its History and Witness, ed. W.B. Selbie (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), pp. 55-79.

[2] "Church," loc. cit., p. 618.

[3] "Presbyterian Churches," p. 76.

brotherhood and love are "far more important than whether the rule is a deacon, an elder, or a bishop."[1]

The Church as thus described by Oman is established on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, but this was not to be understood as an institutional succession. He thought that the attempt to establish the apostolicity of the Church upon a tangible historical continuity of the ceremony of laying on of hands was a dependence on the physical realm which was unworthy of the spiritual nature of the Church. Neither did he believe that apostolic succession could be adequately described by simply asserting that the vision of God which the Apostles knew in a primary revelation is received from them in a secondary capacity, nor did it mean that the Church can interpret only what God's will was for them and neglect to discover what His will may be for today. On the contrary, the concept goes much deeper than that for it involves one's actually becoming a prophet and an apostle in the sense that he must know God's will for himself, accept God's purpose for him as his own, and dedicate himself toward that end in the Church and the world in his own generation.[2] When the foundation of the Church upon the prophets and apostles is interpreted in this way, it is then possible for the Church to understand more clearly its rootage in history and its contemporary responsibility. The Church is a historical congregation because it is founded upon a historical revelation of God in

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[1]Oman, "Presbyterian Churches," p. 77.

[2]Ibid.

which Jesus "is . . the fountain-head and . . . the abiding inspiration" of an "ever-fuller manifestation of God's eternal order of love and freedom."[1] The Church should therefore realize that it cannot ignore either the failures or the accomplishments of its past but must relate itself properly to God's unfolding revelation in history. It must not attempt to isolate itself from the age in which it lives for it has come to its own particular period for a special task, and that work may be approached in the confidence that God will reveal His purpose in the midst of the present situation.

Since the Church has a historical heritage and a historical responsibility, it is necessary and useful that it have a historical organization. As long as the Church is immersed in the historical order it will be impossible for it to be entirely free from organizational structure, some kind of traditional pattern of worship, and the influence of custom. Observing that Christ attended the synagogue regularly, Oman felt that his own generation could be strengthened spiritually if it would establish better habits of self-discipline concerning spiritual matters. While he recognized the varying worth of the different religious organizations, he believed that a vital relationship with some religious body was absolutely essential if one expected to have any meaningful development in the religious life. He went on to declare that "Jesus created something far greater than the Church," for the basic issue concerning the Church is "whether we regard the Church as in

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[1]Oman, "Presbyterian Churches," p. 78.

itself an end or only a very imperfect and, for that reason, necessarily changing means to a higher end."[1]

> We have to recognize the significance of God's providential dealing in once more breaking down the discipline of the Law by division, criticism, and even unbelief. Out of this ferment a new phase of the Church's life must surely issue, and a new vision of the gospel, and then possibly a new and, we trust, a more spiritual incarnation of it in outward form, one in which there will be at once more freedom and more spiritual power.[2]

Men must understand that the organizational form of the Church is like the body of man, absolutely essential to him as long as he remains in the historical order, and that the Church, also like the body, should be under the direction of the soul, and even be continually willing to die to itself that there may be spiritual life.

Another major consideration which Oman developed in his doctrine of the Church was the nature of its true unity, and it was in this area that he did some of his most refreshing thought regarding the Church. Oman explained that there were two basic types of unity: the unity of the quarry in which there can be no change and where external conformity is preserved; and the unity of the building where there is great change and patient struggle and construction according to a master plan. It is futile for the Church to think that it can maintain the unity of the quarry or put the stones back in place again for there has already been too much change and development

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[1] Honest Religion, p. 171.

[2] "Church," p. 623.

for this to be possible. The Church must seek the unity of the building, not thinking presumptuously that its own little sphere is the final manifestation of God's plan, but looking in faith toward the future accomplishment of God's purpose and unity.[1] The same thesis concerning the relation of freedom to the Divine order of love in history which he followed in his treatment of the spiritual nature of the Church as a fellowship is also made the controlling principle in his interpretation of the unity of the Church. He contended that the question of the unity of the Church must always be of paramount theological importance because the Church is in essence a theological community in relationship to God's rule of love which only God can inaugurate. His penetrating analysis of this situation touched the very heart of the problem when he said:

> Sufficient pliability in accepting other people's convictions and a habit of sitting so loosely to ties as not to be galled by other people's fellowship, a spirit of dull mediocrity in ethics, and of uncritical facility of belief, however they cohere in one society, will help men little towards being "perfected into one," which is the only promise of real unity ever given them.[2]

The criterion of unity must always be the degree of spiritual congruity which the Church has to the order of God's love; consequently, the externals of the Church, such as its organization, should continually be the servant of its spiritual functions and relationships. Personal and constructive means toward a deeper spiritual unity must always be sought rather than the mere

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[1] Vision and Authority, pp. 146ff.

[2] Church and Divine Order, p. 307.

arrangement of organizational conformity or the attempt to form a union "hammered together by ecclesiastical compromise."[1]

Oman did not agree with those who saw only embarrassment and failure in the fact that there were many divisions and denominational distinctions within Christianity. He realized that the divisions prevented the Church from having an effective organizational control such as a secular authority might exert, but he felt that this should not disturb the Church since an external authority could not really advance a spiritual kingdom. Even the divisions within the secular realm of the state have been allowed by the providence of God in order that men might know more freedom from the dominion of external authority; therefore, in the realm of the Church, for one "to dismiss our divisions as mere quarrelsomeness and perversity is to be blind to the meaning of history and to lack faith in a guiding hand over human affairs."[2] Since the Church is founded on the principle of freedom, the risks of division adhere to its very nature in an unique and integral way. Christianity began as a separation from Judaism, and obedience to Christ and to the realm of freedom which He introduced may demand at times that our allegiance to Him be affirmed even by division. Oman spoke very strongly against any attempt to establish unity on a superficial basis when he declared:

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[1] The War and Its Issues, p. 117.

[2] Church and Divine Order, p. 308.

> Few things, at least, keep us farther apart than the violent demand for unity which turns narrowness into a virtue, which makes acuteness in discovering our brother to be an alien an evidence of religion, and which considers great stress laid on outward things the highest exercise of piety. As long as these merely external demands appropriate the name of Christ, much outward division may be needed to keep men from entirely forgetting the true unity.[1]

He warned that there may be in God's providential wisdom even more division for the Church in the future in order that men might realize the futility of putting their trust in the externals of the Church and turn again to discover its true unity in love and spiritual fellowship. When this occurs an external union may be possible, not only as an artificial prop for the unity that is lacking, but a true manifestation of the unity which shall exist.

Regardless of how desirable and advantageous the union of the Church may be, the way in which it is sought is even more significant than the union which may result. An attitude of genuine respect for the sincerity of others, and not just acquiescence in their differences, must characterize any search for spiritual unity, for if this attitude does not prevail there can only exist an indifferent tolerance toward other positions which really contains less of the Christian spirit of love than an impassioned abhorance of other opinions. "May not one divine purpose in our divisions be just the production in us of a charity which believeth all things on some more Christian ground than the instinct of the herd."[2] The spirit of union

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[1] Vision and Authority, p. 149.

[2] Church and Divine Order, p. 310.

must begin in the broad realm of the Christian experience of sincerity and humility where ideas and practices are less rigid and stereotyped and are most vital and dynamic. Here in this realm it is easier to appreciate spiritual growth and to accept the contributions and the limitations of others in the light of one's own absolute dependence on God. When union is approached in this attitude, which Oman called the "soul of unity", then it is probable that some of the separations in the Church may be healed because it would be realized that the soul of the Church is the free association of men together under God and in His spirit, and the external framework is its body. Men would then cease to "expect from the body what is only possible for the soul."[1] However, Oman did not speak entirely in a negative way concerning the unity of the Church. He declared:

> Every society should be expected to realise that the Church is different from all other societies in this, that its ideal is its essence. Each society must have an ideal of the Church, and consider in what way it is serving that ideal in its separate state, else it can only exist as a successful corporation without vision of the kingdom of God. When by that test it fails to justify its existence of itself, when it no longer stands alone for the aspect of freedom for which it came into being, it should endeavour, if possible to bring its isolation to an end.[2]

The Churches therefore have the responsibility to seek every spiritual means to keep from being divided on mere external inconsequentials and to express and embody their unity in Christ.

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[1] Church and Divine Order, p. 312.

[2] Ibid., p. 312.

Oman believed that many of the divisions in the Church could be avoided if men were more conscious of the fact that though the Church is involved in the limitations which are inescapable in a historical order, there is nothing in all the world that can prevent God from fulfilling his purpose. When this is realized, the temptation will not be nearly so great to wait until every aspect of the Church has been purified before aligning oneself with it and sharing in its responsibility. Since the Church is one in fellowship and at the same time necessarily entangled in the affairs of history, it is not possible to escape being identified with and involved in, and in some measure responsible for, every historical manifestation of the Church, regardless of how incongruous it may be to the ideal nature of the Church. If there is no serious violation of conscience involved or profound impression to do otherwise, one owes his gratitude and his service to that Church which was initially responsible for introducing him into the community of Christian faith. Even so, one has the responsibility to remain sensitive to all the historical forms and practical expressions of the Christian faith and to seek continually ways that the Christian communities may be united. Oman concluded that if the Church is ever to be one, its unity must be accomplished by faith in the power of God's spirit to overcome the divisions which the legal temper has imposed, and there must be the

risk to love men even as God has loved them in His Church. The Churches must realize that the only kind of competition between them which is compatable with their calling is that they "should be rivals only in preaching the good news."[1] Once this spirit has been accepted it will mean that there will be such a transformation of our theological and ecclesiastical pride that "we shall either have outward union, or be so united in heart as to be able to do without it."[2]

The final emphasis to be considered in this exposition of Oman's doctrine of the task of the Church, and this concluding division may serve as a brief review and general statement of the main principles of interpretation which Oman used throughout his theology, and more particularly in his doctrine of the Church, to stress the primacy of the Church as a spiritual fellowship with God in freedom. The primary responsibility of the Church, according to Oman, is to provide a fellowship and an atmosphere where the children of God will be encouraged and inspired to acknowledge their ultimate allegiance to the authority and the love of God. The early Church "held no such exclusive view as nulla salus extra ecclesiam, but there was a glad sense of possessing in a special degree a salvation which made it a joy to bring men into the fellowship of the Christian society."[3]

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[1] War and Its Issues, p. 123.

[2] Church and Divine Order, p. 315 . Cf. Vision and Authority, p. 149.

[3] Church and Divine Order, p. 71.

To accomplish this redemptive task today the Church must not depend on its power to compel men to submit to creed, institution, or political authority, but it must rely wholly upon the convicting and persuasive power of the Spirit of God.

> We are all labouring to make our churches outwardly impressive rather than inwardly persuasive. We imagine the two aims are quite consistent, but . . . you can't lay stress, say, on having your deacons prosperous and also on having them saints, you can't lay stress on nourishing well-to-do congregations and also in caring for the souls of men.[1]

The Church must seek to "kindle the soul's own light by bringing God's own fire to it from the altar."[2] Oman summarized the task of the Church with an emphasis which well characterizes the basic concern of his whole life and thought when he declared that the essence of our responsibility is for us to live like saints of God in this world. We must be men who surrender our freedom only to the Spirit of God, and then allow Him to create in us what He wills, being confident that in the strength of His will we shall be able to realize our own identity and fulfil our own destiny without frustration and defeat. We shall no longer be overwhelmed by the forces of evil nor will we desert to expediencies because we live in the assurance that the Kingdom of God has already come because we have seen the vision of its triumph for ourselves.

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[1] Dialogue With God, p. 158.

[2] Church and Divine Order, p. 324.

This temper has not failed. It has not been tried. Perhaps now that so many external supports of Christianity have fallen and we are back at the position before the days when the world took to patronising Christianity, it may have a chance. It will, if we do not say, "The bricks have fallen, but we will build with hewn stones," and say instead, "not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord."[1]

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[1] Church and Divine Order, p. 332.

SECTION III

EVALUATION

CHAPTER IX

CRITICAL EVALUATION

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In evaluating Oman's contribution to theology it will be necessary to remember that while Oman was in the midst of his theological work, the major trend of theology changed from an idealistic, anthropological and immanental direction to a transcendental, revelational and eschatological character largely as a result of the rise of neo-orthodoxy. It is possible to compare Oman with the more recent theology and criticize him for his failure to include many of the emphases found in neo-orthodoxy, and also to appreciate his development of some emphases which neo-orthodoxy has neglected; however, the main criterion in this critical evaluation must be the inherent value and consistency of Oman's individual thought and his relatively unique and significant contribution to theology. This evaluation shall therefore be approached from this writer's own evangelical theological perspective, which seeks to be orientated around the pattern and content of Biblical revelation.

The one single characteristic which best describes Oman's theology is the quality of comprehensiveness or wholeness, which kept his theology from becoming an isolationistic theologism concerned with only one compartment of life, and enabled him to convey the existential relevance of religion to every area of life. All of man's varied experiences do comprise a unity and a wholeness in which religion is not an intruder but an

integral aspect of man's life which has developed alongside his experience in other areas as man has responded to his environment. Oman might have made a greater contribution to theology if he had made a clearer distinction between methodology and content but there is nevertheless an inherent integrity in his thought which convinces one that it is not merely a theoretical or "paper theology" but a practical and sincere attempt to interpret the breath of experience. One example of this wholeness or comprehensiveness may be found in the way he refused to allow the religious and ethical components of man's religious experience to be separated as they had been in Otto's interpretation of religion. Oman was continually aware of the danger of the partial view or the compartmentalized interpretation of religion. He realized that religion is often considered as merely an anti-rational experience of fear or awe, or on the other hand, that it may degenerate to a mere moralism. He recognized this threat in Otto's interpretation of religion and his reinterpretation of the inseparable relationship between the awesome and the ethical aspects of man's religious experience even in its earliest germ is a very helpful corrective at this point. It is also interesting to note that the basic concern for wholeness in Oman's thought was already firmly developed and expressed in Grace and Personality, wherein he pointed out that the religious experience of grace must be considered as at the same time ethical and religious, long before Otto had addressed himself to this problem in The Idea of the Holy.

The practical and experiential characteristics of Oman's interpretation of religion are also helpful where he insisted that the conviction of the existence of the Supernatural is not something which is derived by a logical or metaphysical extension from the experience of the holy and the evaluation of the sacred. At least the progress of Oman's thought from an intuitive and experiential awareness of living in a Supernatural environment to the cognitive conclusion that this environment exists and is to be understood as personal, makes the epistemological transition from experience to existence as smoothly and adequately as it can be made by a logical or metaphysical method. The belief that the Supernatural exists may receive metaphysical support and clarification from rational sources, but Oman was right when he refused to place the original question of the existence of the Supernatural at the disposal of the metaphysician, for it is best that the experiential nature of religion be understood from the very beginning of man's relations with the Supernatural.

Although Oman does not rely expressly on the Biblical testimony concerning the way God may be known in what has been called general revelation, he has adequately recognized that through the whole course of God's sustaining man in his existence, and in the structure of the created world, God has given witness to Himself.[1] Man does have a fragmentary but true knowledge of God which may come to him even as Oman described the

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[1]Acts 14:17; Romans 1:19-20, 2:14-15.

experience of the holy and the sacred as evidence of the reality of the Supernatural. It is this knowledge, as well as that which comes from Christ more fully, which comprises the grounds of man's responsibility before God. While Oman would have agreed with Karl Barth's insistence that man has no disposition toward the Word of God or capacity for revelation in and of himself, for everything is given to him by God,[1] he would have rejected Barth's interpretation that the image of God has been annihilated.[2] Oman was actually much nearer to Emil Brunner's position that man does retain an ausprechbarkeit, or an element of "addressability" in his nature due to the continual sustaining relationship which man has with God.[3] Oman might even have been nearer to Kant than he was to Brunner on the question of the structure of man's personality, for Oman frequently employed the form of freedom in a Kantian way almost as if it were a category of "discoverability" which man possessed in his capacity to interpret his environment. Be that as it may, Oman did have confidence in man's capacity to perceive the existence of the Supernatural through his relations with his environment, and as an initial observation this confidence is justified. However, he did not follow through carefully enough on his conviction that the crucial question in religion is not man's knowledge of the existence of the Supernatural, but how

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[1]Barth, Church Dogmatics, Volume I, Section 1, p. 221, and Section 2, p. 235.

[2]Ibid., Volume I, Section 1, p. 273.

[3]Brunner, Man in Revolt, p. 98.

the Supernatural and man are related to one another. In the actual relation of man to the Supernatural as it is reflected in world religions, the historical evidence reveals little encouragement for Oman's optimistic exhortation that man's responsibility is "to discover the true Supernatural. . . . to exercise the true sense of the holy and have the right judgment of the sacred."[1] This very thing is what man is incapable of doing without something of a divine strength or infinite succour which Oman does not adequately discuss. Even though he recognized the danger of corrupting the witness of reality with insincerity at the very point of man's encounter with his environment, and even though he admitted that there can be bad religion, he did not apply these themes very extensively to show the result of man's insincerity in the manifestations of his religions. He almost speaks as though the problem of insincerity could be handled rather easily if man were only to apply himself to the task. The New Testament speaks in very drastic terms of the basic nature of the man who is unreconciled to Christ when it describes him as one who is incomplete, or sick, darkened, imprisoned, and even dead in sin;[2] consequently, man is not capable of being reconciled to the world through a proper evaluation of the Natural and Supernatural, until he is newly created by God in a way which even transforms and empowers man's capacity to evaluate and respond.[3]

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[1] Natural and Supernatural, p. 72.

[2] Mark 2:17; John 8:12; John 8:34; Romans 6:16; II Timothy 2:26; II Peter 2:19; and Ephesians 2:1-5.

[3] II Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 3:10.

Oman did not emphasize that the remnants of man's relationship to God which find expression in the religions of man are but broken and empty shells which must be refashioned by God and filled with the content of His revelation in Christ.[1]

Oman has given comprehensiveness to his approach to religion by his willingness to study all the phenomena claiming to be religion; however, his desire to show the common ground of all religions in their dealings with the whole breadth of man's relations with the Natural and Supernatural has caused him to overlook the distinctive character of Hebraic revelation. Since Oman did not clearly relate prophetic religion either by comparison or contrast to the other types of religion in his classification, one is left with the impression that the basic affinity which all religions have in their concern for redemption from the evanescent is more determinative than any antithesis or essential difference which may be present in prophetic religion. By allowing Ritschl's category of redemption from the evanescent to be the dominating criterion of description for religion, and even for prophetic religion, Oman has failed to distinguish clearly between a proper relation with the world in its Natural and Supernatural aspects and the personalistic and voluntaristic nature of prophetic revelation. Although Oman did say that reconciliation in prophetic religion is wholly of God, he did not sufficiently stress God's personal initiative and action in revealing Himself through the

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[1] Jeremiah 2:13, Acts 17:22ff.

the prophets to call man to responsible decision toward Him and to grant man a reconciliation which is possible in no other way. He overlooked the fact that while the evanescent is a legitimate concern for religion, the greatest problem with which prophetic religion is concerned is not the problem of evanescence or finitude, but rather the problem of man's sin against God. Evanescence is surely a fact of man's finite existence which provides many occasions for his sin, but the most significant aspect of man's sin in its Biblical description is that man sins against God by putting his own free and responsible causality into the evanescent human situation. Oman's interpretation of religion would therefore have been much truer to the stress which he placed on freedom and personality in his system if he had interpreted religion in closer connection with the responsibility which man has for his sin. Oman failed to acknowledge that the Hebrew prophets gave the most severe condemnation of world religions ever given, and this includes the sins of Israel's religion. If this had been stressed, Oman might have recognized that eschatological note basic to the Hebrew prophets that God not only reveals Himself and His purpose in the midst of the evanescent situation, but that He also reveals Himself in judgment upon man for his role in the moral and spiritual condition of his world. Oman's failure to develop this essential aspect of the prophetic revelation is characteristic of his weakness in eschatology throughout his system.

Even though Oman spoke of religion as giving significance to the personal nature of man's environment, he did not interpret the personal

nature of the Supernatural in his methodological approach to the study of religion as fully or adequately as his more distinctive Christian personalism demands. He spoke rather cautiously of the Supernatural as an environment which best expresses itself in experience in terms of personal relationship, but he would have been truer to his own methodological principle of interpreting reality from the highest manifestation man can know had he given greater attention, even in his prolegomena, to the Christian religion, especially the doctrine of reconciliation in all its personalistic manifestations, as the interpretative motif and evaluating criterion for religion. If Oman's interpretation of Christian reconciliation as God's personal gracious gift had been brought to bear on his interpretation of religion—and it will be remembered that his interpretation of grace was given much earlier than his discussion on religion—he could have shown more clearly how God's grace in Christ is the only adequate answer to man's strivings with his environment. He might also have recognized that God's grace unveils the self-assertive and perverted attempts to manipulate God which are often present in man's religions. Oman's interpretation of religion needed some of Barth's insight that when human religion is evaluated from the Christian perspective it may in some sense be considered as "the realm of man's attempts to justify and to sanctify himself before a capricious and arbitrary conception of God."[1] While man's religions are

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[1]Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. I, Section 2, p. 280.

often the expression of man's highest response to the Supernatural as Oman explained, there is also present a complex human attempt to achieve and control God's grace which the Christian doctrine of grace can only interpret in the light of God's judgment, and which Oman never really brought to bear on his interpretation of religion.

The most fundamental weakness of Oman's interpretation of religion lies in his failure to show how religion, even prophetic religion, is related to the revelation of God in Christ. While recognizing that Oman was primarily trying to give a methodology for the principles which should be included in a proper approach to the study of religion, one is tempted to ask if Oman went far enough in his interpretation of religion to make any really distinct contribution to an understanding of the Christian religion. The spiritual climate in Schleiermacher's day may have needed a defense of religion, but what the twentieth century has needed is an interpretation of the uniqueness of the Christian revelation. Although Oman did effectively show how the Natural has the capacity for receiving God's revelation, he did not discuss how the Christian religion has its similarities , affinities, and weaknesses along with other religions, but is at the same time distinctive in a way that is more than just difference in degree, for it uniquely embodies the transcendental revelation of God in the Incarnation. Where Oman is often satisfied to say that revelation is a proper relation to the Natural and the Supernatural, a discernment of the divine order of love, or even life as

interpreted by Jesus Christ, neo-orthodoxy has been much nearer the Biblical norm of revelation when it has emphasized revelation as an event of God's self-giving which is Christ, for the revelation of God has been accomplished once for all when the Son of God actually became man.[1] With our greater emphasis on Biblical revelation today, it may now be possible to appropriate and relate Oman's interpretation of the phenomena of religion as an expression of man's relations with his environment to the more distinctive and unique elements of the Christian religion, using Christian revelation as the standard and norm of interpretation.

Oman should be commended for recognizing the importance of freedom for theology, and for deliberately seeking to establish his system on the principles of freedom. An understanding of freedom is as central and necessary for theology as the concepts of reason, grace, or even revelation; yet it seldom receives as much careful attention and analysis as these doctrines. Theology is continually needing the reminder that Oman gave to his generation that one must see the importance of freedom if religion is to be anything more than a result of mechanical processes and determined responses. Religion has to do with men and history and God can never be adequately interpreted abstractly and philosophically apart from man's real experience of freedom; therefore, the broad outlines of Oman's emphasis on freedom will be needed as long as men continue to obscure the reality of man's freedom with the

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[1] Barth, Church Dogmatics, Volume I, Section 1, p. 134, and Section 2, pp. 345-46. Cf. Brunner, Revelation and Reason, pp. 8, 258.

concepts of process, determination or illusion.

Oman has shown quite adequately the impossibility of surrendering the solution of the problem of freedom to either moral or mechanical necessity. Man does live at the same time in both the realm of moral consequences and the realm of calculable mechanical order, and he could not be true to his experience if he ignored either realm or exalted either order to cosmological proportions. Oman actually gave stronger treatment to the problem of the mechanical concept of inertia than to the idea of the equivalence of action and award in the moral realm. He pointed out very effectively that freedom cannot exist in a world which is only mechanical vibration, but he did not deal very extensively with the harder problem of man's moral freedom producing real consequences. A part of Oman's weakness here may be due to his failure to define or distinguish between that freedom which is primarily related to things in cause and effect sequence, and that freedom which is more closely related to man's moral response to his Supernatural environment which is moral and personal in essence. The failure to acknowledge the distinctive personal nature of man's environment, which was pointed out in the discussion of Oman's interpretation of religion, also weakened Oman's cosmological treatment of freedom. Freedom was interpreted in Oman's cosmological discussion as if the only conflict were between freedom and mechanical necessity, for at this point of his exposition he even treated freedom in the moral realm as the freedom which is contrasted to a mechanical equivalence of action and award. While it is

true, as he has pointed out, that many interpret the moral aspect of man's freedom mechanically, Oman has not adequately dealt with the question of the moral consequences of man's freedom by merely rejecting the mechanical solution which some have offered to that problem. He needed to go on and relate more clearly man's moral freedom and its consequences to the personal moral order of his environment. He should not have been satisfied, even in this introductory area, to dismiss the problem by saying that the belief in the equivalence of action and award somehow witnesses to the belief that the universe is basically just, for this is precisely where the crucial problem of moral freedom begins. The question of how man's free acts bear consequences which further limit or liberate man's future actions never received adequate consideration in Oman's thought. The nearest he came to facing the problem squarely was in his exposition of grace, where he declared that sin brings consequences which can never be dismissed as though the past had never happened, and that the consequences of sin provide many of our present responsibilities. He did maintain that one can be reconciled to God and transform the consequences of sin by God's help, but he did not give an adequate treatment of the effect of sin on man's freedom, either in the historical context of the effect of sin on the race, or its personal effects on the individual.

The Biblical concept of freedom, which is contrasted primarily to sin rather than to necesstty as Oman has emphasized, never received

adequate attention in Oman's interpretation. Jesus taught that everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin and Paul declared that "sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace," and speaks of "having been set free from sin."[1] Without taking away from Oman's interpretation of freedom in contrast to necessity, and without applying proof texts of Scripture against him unfairly, it may be said that just as his interpretation of religion would have been stronger if he had not limited his emphasis so much to the problem of evanescence and dealt more seriously with the problem of sin, so his interpretation of freedom would have been stronger if he had not placed the balance of his interpretation in rejecting forms of determinism, and had given more serious and extended considera- to the relation of freedom to sin. Christ does invite men to come to Him in the freedom of their personal response, but it must also be said that Christ came to set men free from the enslaving effect of their sin, and to bestow upon men a Christian liberty which they did not and could not possess, even in their freedom to respond or reject his invitation, unless they be liberated by Christ and His truth.[2] When Christ is freely received, there is a personal spiritual endowment given in the relationship whereby man is liberated from the "law of sin and death," enabling him to stand in the freedom of Christ.[3]

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[1] John 8:34; Romans 6:14; Romans 6:18.

[2] John 8:32, 36; Romans 6:18; II Cor. 3:17;

[3] Romans 8:2, Galatians 5:1.

In other words, the Christian man is freed from self-defeating bondage to himself, and from a merely external obligation to God's law, and is given the freedom and strength to perform that which he not only ought to do, but that which he truly wants to do in service for Christ. While Oman did not deny this, he tarried so long in emphasizing that truth must be freely received that he had little occasion to interpret what the receiving of Christ actually does by way of further liberating and empowering a man in Christian experience.

One of the most valuable emphases in Oman's interpretation of freedom is the way in which he insisted on the form of freedom as the structural basis of moral personality. Although the Bible does not present this emphasis in the philosophical and theological mould which Oman followed in his discussion, it does affirm or imply in every event where God and man are seen in relation that man is a free being who can and must make significant and responsible decisions. Karl Barth would probably consider Oman's interpretation of freedom as one which attempted to achieve a Protestant synthesis or "balance" between freedom and grace, between man and God, which, according to Barth, would amount to a denial of the absolute dependence of faith on the sovereign grace and freedom of God. Barth believes that the doctrine of election in Christ, rather than the doctrine of man's freedom, is the proper perspective for interpreting God's relationship to man.[1] While

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[1]Barth, Church Dogmatics, Volume II, Section 2, p. 193. Cf. Volume IV, Section 1, pp. 449-50.

Oman's thought would have been stronger if he had captured more of the revelational and elective initiative which Barth's interpretation possesses, it is also true that Oman has recognized more effectively than Barth that the grace which God offers in Christ cannot be understood apart from the recognition that God has made men in the very structure of their created being, as persons who are free to respond or not to respond to the revelation given them, and that since they are capable of response, they are therefore responsible for the way that they use their freedom, even if this leads to an ultimate rejection of God's grace. An interpretation of the significance of freedom for Christian thought can and should go further than Oman has gone in relating the structural form of freedom to the freedom which Christ gives in Christian experience, but the interpretation must at least begin by taking the form of man's freedom seriously as Oman has done.

There is a fundamental omission in Oman's interpretation of freedom which greatly weakens his contribution to theology and further illustrates the vast difference between his theology and the contemporary emphasis of neo-orthodoxy on revelation. Throughout his interpretation of freedom, Oman stressed the freedom of man to respond to his environment. He acknowledged that man's environment is essentially personal and that the Kingdom of God is a divine order of gracious love, but there is scarcely a reference which could be interpreted as an emphasis on the personal freedom of God in his revelation to man. The freedom of God is the very essence of

His nature and the ground of His authority, according to Karl Barth,[1] and Paul Tillich has recognized that almost every word in the Bible witnesses to the freedom of God in His dealings with man.[2] If Oman had developed this theme alongside his concept of the freedom of moral personality, his whole theology could have been given a sounder basis in Biblical authority, for it is this absence of an emphasis on the sovereign freedom of God in revelation which characterizes the greatest single weakness in Oman's theology.

Oman made his greatest contribution to an understanding of religious authority, not by constructing an elaborate theoretical interpretation, nor by discovering or stressing anything new or unique, for there is really nothing in his interpretation which Ritschl had not said before. Rather, his greatest contribution lies in the way in which he stressed the priority of the internal authority and its practical implications for every area of experience. The comprehensiveness or wholeness which is so characteristic of Oman's approach is not found so much in the breadth of his discussion of the structure or the delineation of authority as such, for he really could have done much better than he did in distinguishing various emphases in authority, but it is found more in his application of the principle of internal authority to the practical concern for the whole of life. Although Oman needed to relate his

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[1] Barth, Church Dogmatics, Volume I, Section 1, p. 352.

[2] Tillich, Systematic Theology, Volume I, p. 248.

interpretation of internal authority more clearly to that which he called external authority, the principle of internal authority—that nothing in any realm can ever be a properly functioning authority in our lives until we see it and respond to it appropriately for ourselves—is an emphasis which every age must learn.

Oman had a revelational, or perhaps more accurately described, a supernatural concept of authority in the sense of realizing that everything of worth for man has its ultimate origin in God and not in man himself, and in recognizing that the only ultimate authority is the authority of the truth itself, but he did not adequately describe the locus of authority in its distinctive Christological and Biblical pattern. His greatest weakness in this area lies in his failure to clarify the relationship between the external authority of the truth as it is in itself, and the internal authority as it has been received in experience. Indeed, where Oman is really weakest in this regard is in his failure to acknowledge the limitations of such a distinction as internal and external authority in the first place. Even though an interpreter surely has the right to use the concepts of internal and external authority, for some sort of distinction must be employed, he should make it abundantly clear, as Oman often did not, that it is impossible to speak of internal and external authority as if they are really two separate and isolated realities, for they can never be experienced in such isolation. Our consciousness always includes elements of both aspects in our experience, although we may choose at times

to emphasize one more than the other in our interpretation.

Oman was so concerned to stress the acceptance of authority in freedom as an insight of one's own mind that he failed to give proper attention to the more objective qualities of Christian authority. He frequently spoke as though the external aspects of the authority of Christ, the Church or Scripture were exclusively mechanical or even despotic in character, with little or no internal or spiritual authority involved. What this tendency really amounts to, surprisingly enough, is that Oman, who was elsewhere so concerned with the unity of experience, has failed in his own intention toward wholeness by letting an artificial, or at least an ill-defined, antithesis remain in his interpretation of the internal and the external authority. It should be admitted, however, that there are times when Oman appears to have overcome, or at least to have acknowledged, the false contrast between the internal authority and the external authority. When he spoke of the authority of Christ, and more particularly of the Cross of Christ, which one has seen for himself, he attempted to unite the internal and external authority—but the burden of his emphasis fell on the internal authority which has been recognized and there was little concern given to that which may be called the external or objective authority of Christ's person and His revelation. It is not enough to insist that there can be no merely external authority in religion, for the fact remains that there is an authority in Christ and Scripture and the Church which to some extent is external and is authoritative as ontologically independent even of man's individual insight

and receptiveness. It is true as Oman has stressed that truth or authority will not be an adequate functioning truth or authority unless one accepts it for himself; however, it is also true, in a way that Oman never found opportunity to stress, that a proper authority in religion possesses an intrinsic authority in itself whether or not it has been accepted.

Oman has quite adequately emphasized a very essential element in any understanding of the authority of Christ for the Christian religion when he stresses that the method of Christ's approach to men is to speak to their highest natures and call from them their free response. Christ does exercise His lordship over man in such a gracious manner that He does not destroy man's self-respect or integrity as a person but enriches his life by presenting him with an object worthy of his freedom. Oman has therefore very appropriately described an integral aspect of Christ's means of dealing with men, and this theme must ever be near the center of interpretation where the authority of Christ is presented. However, in concentrating his exposition so heavily in the area of Christ's method of dealing with men, Oman has almost entirely neglected to consider the grounds or the basis of Christ's authority—and the means whereby authority is accepted must never be confused with the basis of authority. Even though Oman is correct when he speaks of the way Christ approaches men, he should not have failed to stress what Christ Himself witnessed to, both in word and action, as the grounds of his authority and the basis of His invitation to men. It is

certainly true, as Oman has pointed out, that Christ did not present Himself merely as an external authority; however, it is true in a way which Oman did not emphasize that Christ presented His revelation as the Son of God, and His commission to the Church as one to whom "all authority in heaven and on earth" had been given.[1] It almost seems that Oman, in his desire to avoid presenting Christ as a tyrannical external authority, has withheld from Him something of the essential authority of His person. This limitation in Oman's thought is all the more significant in that in none of his writings does he clearly describe his doctrine of the person of Christ. Furthermore, while it may also be true, as Oman said, that Christ appealed directly to man who is made in the image of God, the Biblical account of Christ's ministry is far more concerned with what Christ declared of God to man than it is with the major emphasis of Oman on that which Christ appealed to in man or drew from him.[2] Oman has therefore overstated his position when he said that Christ did not portray Himself as an authority, for there is an inherent authority in Christ's person and work which cannot successfully be avoided.

Oman's interpretation of the authority of Scripture suffers from the same weakness pointed out earlier concerning the fallacy of the distinction

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[1] Matthew 28:18.

[2] John 1:18; Mark 1:14ff; Luke 10:21-24; Matthew 25:3f; Ephesians 1:9.

between internal and external authority. The very fact that Oman is content to discuss his interpretation of the authority of Scripture under the heading of external authority is an indication that he did not give proper attention to the internal structure of the Scriptures themselves, that is, the witness which they give to the inner aspects of the writer's experience, and the basic concern of the Scriptures to precipitate an inner personal response in man. Nor did Oman satisfactorily deal with the external or objective aspects of the Scriptures for he was primarily concerned to say what kind of authority they do not possess. He was satisfied to say that the authority which Scripture has must be received in freedom rather than imposed on man by the force of an infallible proclamation, and with this one may agree; however, it is the lack of more positive construction in Oman's interpretation of Scripture which prompts the criticism that he emphasized the form of freedom to the neglect of its content. Oman's interpretation of authority would have been much better if he could have realized that the authority of God's Word in Scripture can be auto-pistic or self-validating and must be received in freedom, but that at the same time there are appropriate historical and theological considerations which are legitimate guides to establishing a criterion for helping one determine the reliability and trustworthiness of a Scriptural authority. For example, if Oman had followed through on his concept of revelation being given to the race in history, he would surely have emphasized more clearly than he did that the Scripture is revealing not[1]

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[1]Due to typographical error, page 244 immediately follows page 242. The continuity of the text is uninterrupted.

only an eternal Word of God to be received by individual men as an internal authority, but also the coming of the eternal Son of God in flesh into the very fabric of the events of history. He would therefore have been able to emphasize how the historical proximity of the Biblical writers to the historical revelation gives an indispensible significance to the content of that about which they wrote and he would not have allowed the weight of his interpretation to fall almost exclusively upon the theme of the internal authority of Christ with which "no fellow mortal, were he even an Apostle, should intervene."[1]

Oman should have put more stress upon the value of Scripture as a historical revelation which is an external authority, properly understood, compatable with and conducive to the freedom of man and his internal spiritual insight, but nevertheless an authority historically and ontologically distinguishable from man's existential response. There are, as Oman pointed out, many difficulties concerning the authority of Scripture, and one has no right to demand of him an exhaustive account of the inspiration and authority of Scripture; however, it is necessary to conclude that his emphasis, as far as it goes, is a valuable one, but it is regrettable that he treated such an essential question as Scriptural authority so negatively.

It must be asked, finally in this connection, if Oman really gained anything by substituting the principle of rationalism on the form of freedom

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[1] Vision and Authority, p. 193.

for the emphasis on the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, which was available to him in his own Reformed tradition. Oman's interpretation of authority would have been greatly strengthened if he had given it a more adequate Christological and Trinitarian structure by stressing the role of the Holy Spirit as the agent who convinces and illumines inwardly the more objective and external aspects of God's revelation. The Reformers had acknowledged that man must receive God's truth for himself, and Calvin especially sought to make it abundantly clear without mere negative warnings that God's truth comes through Christ as He is witnessed to by the Scriptures as the instruments of God's revelation which are illumined by the Holy Spirit.[1] In this emphasis there was already at hand a very effective instrument of interpretation for uniting the internal and external authority toward which Oman was striving in his interpretation, and for integrating those converging aspects of the authority of Christ, Scripture, and the Church into the cohesiveness and unity of Christian experience, which could have helped Oman avoid many of the dangers of his more subjective emphasis on the primacy of the internal authority.

Oman certainly succeeded in his intention to follow the course laid down for theology by Schleiermacher and Ritschl when they attempted to reject all impersonal elements in religion and sought to reorientate Christian theology around a personal understanding of grace. Oman made a significant contribution to theology by the unrelenting way he pursued

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[1]Calvin, Institutes, Book I, Section VII, p. 4-5.

the personalistic approach in his interpretation of the doctrine of grace, and by the way he stressed persuasive grace as over against irresistible grace, and the non-personal juridical, penal theories of grace. Oman has been an effective voice in insisting on the inadequacy of an impersonal interpretation of God's grace which conceived grace as a mere supernatural force which worked on man sub-personally by sacramental magic, legalistic bookkeeping, or overriding will. It will never be possible nor indeed advisable to purge theology completely of its non-personal or legalistic terminology, since many of these concepts are derived from Biblical language and have certain aspects of the justice and holiness of God to represent; nevertheless, it may be concluded that Oman has provided a helpful service to theology by reminding interpreters that whatever else the grace of God may involve, it must be considered as basically a gracious relationship which is distinctively personal.

Although Oman shared a similar theme with neo-orthodoxy concerning the interrelatedness of revelation and reconciliation, there was quite a difference between the two meanings and emphases. Oman tended to identify reconciliation with forgiveness, therefore, when he discussed revelation and reconciliation he was concerned primarily to stress the familiar refrain of his theology: that revelation must be received and appropriated as reconciliation, i.e., forgiveness, before it could be really understood as revelation. On the other hand, Karl Barth seeks to establish the significance of the person and work of Christ in the accomplishment of reconciliation which makes

forgiveness possible. Revelation can only be meaningfully appropriated when it has been received in an experience where the grace of God has truly become personal and forgiving for the one who has received it, and this experiential side of revelation as response must always be acknowledged in order that the personal redemptive purpose of revelation shall not be lost. Nevertheless, Oman's emphasis became unbalanced when he allowed his insistence on the necessity of receiving God's revelation in a relationship of forgiveness to overshadow the essential noetic function of revelation as an unveiling and offering of God Himself for response which could never have taken place if God had not given Himself in the event of revelation. The weakness of Oman's interpretation of the relationship between revelation and reconciliation is never more clearly apparent than when he attempted to show the significance of Christ as the revelation of God because He is also the means of reconciliation. The description of Christ in such phrases as one who has a "right relation to God," who is an "inspiration of our insight," or even the "embodiment of a relation to the Father,"[1] hardly seem adequate to describe the uniqueness of Christ's deity which is necessary for the accomplishment of God's revelation and reconciliation.

Even though Oman is weaker than Barth in acknowledging the elements of intervention, giveness, and accomplishment in the event of

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 158.

revelation and reconciliation through Christ, Oman is more effective than Barth in describing the place of the individual in the reception and acknowledgement of that revelation and reconciliation which has been accomplished. While Barth's doctrine of revelation as reconciliation does convey the conviction that a divine event has indeed occurred for man in Christ, Oman much more clearly acknowledged the graciousness of that event as a personal gift for the individual in his freedom. The criticisms of both Oman and Barth on this theme are not so much on what each has affirmed but on what has been neglected. Since the adequacy of the doctrine of grace depends largely on the question of the relationship between the emphases on what God has done, and what man in turn receives, it may be that Oman's basic stress on grace as primarily God's being personally gracious to man and man's receiving this grace personally, can provide a necessary complement to the emphasis on the accomplishment of reconciliation through Christ which has been made by neo-orthodoxy.

Oman's doctrine of grace suffers from a weakness which has already been noted in the evaluation of his interpretation of religion. Just as he had in his understanding of religion given the priority of concern to the natural world in which one became conscious of the supernatural, so in his treatment of grace he declared that any investigation of grace must begin by investigating the nature of personality. As a result, the priority of concern is given to the nature of moral personality rather than to the nature of

God's grace. This is a valid principle of interpretation if it is allowed to mean primarily that there can be no a priori doctrine of God's grace, but that the grace of God must be approached by seeking to understand its relationship to the freedom of moral personality, and Oman surely had this emphasis uppermost in his mind. However, there are serious consequences involved, from which Oman did not altogether escape, when God's revelational priority and initiative in unveiling to man his essential nature is relinquished to the axioms of rationalism concerning the autonomy of moral personality. Oman could have avoided falling into this difficulty if he had been more consistent in following his own insight concerning the integral relationship between revelation and reconciliation—that is, if he had insisted more clearly that the nature of reconciliation can be understood only when its dependence on revelation is acknowledged. Since he did not develop this theme, it almost appears that Oman has attempted to construct a Christian doctrine of grace upon a rationalistic and humanistic experiential foundation. To know first the nature of human personality, as Oman desired, cannot really be possible because man is so involved in the sin and contradiction of his own nature and circumstances that he does not actually have an adequate standpoint from which to evaluate his personality. The order of Barth's approach is much nearer to the Biblical perspective than Oman's , for revelation and grace must come first, then the truer and fuller understanding of personality. Oman had the prerogative to use whatever insights and tools rationalism may provide for help in understanding

the nature of man as a free and autonomous being, but it should have been made abundantly clear which perspective is the dominating and controlling directive for Christian thought.

Oman's interpretation of the atonement may be called the moral influence theory in that it concentrates more upon Jesus as an example or a symbol of God's love and willingness to be gracious than it does upon any ontological distinctiveness of the person of Christ and his work. Many of Oman's phrases explaining how faith is given by God through the "whole of revelation", and the "whole of Christianity,"[1] convey a legitimate concern for comprehensiveness but they leave much of the content of the Christian faith rather nebulous and undefined. When Oman, like Ritschl, tends to merge the characteristics of justification, forgiveness and reconciliation, he really fails to do justice to the objectivity of the reality which these terms represent. Oman's major emphasis on the gracious willingness of God to forgive and the necessity for man to recognize this graciousness, usually overshadows the objective accomplishment of Christ's reconciliation and justification which makes forgiveness available. Atonement in the broad sense which that word covers theologically in the New Testament is not just a revelation of the love of the Father who is willing to receive the sinner home, although it involves that, but it is primarily the creation of a new

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 158.

condition which is brought into full existence by the event of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The Scriptures speak of the believer's being "reconciled to God by the death of His Son," and of God who was "in Christ reconciling the world to himself." They declare that "Christ died for our sins," that He "offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins."[1] Oman may have been justified in his rejection of the crude interpretation of the legalistic elements in some theories of atonement, but he usually spoke as though all objective or legalistic metaphors were impersonal and therefore to be avoided, and he reinterpreted these analogies in such a way that the distinctive character of their Biblical meaning was lost in the attempt to make every description of grace essentially personal.

By failing to capture the crucial note of the apostolic kerygma that "if Christ has not been raised your faith is futile and you are still in your sins", Oman greatly neglected the significance of the resurrection for the accomplishment of reconciliation and a demonstration of the power of God's grace.[2] He probably assumed that this event and its consequences would be understood to be included in all that he said concerning the cross; however, such a cardinal issue should not have been almost totally ignored for it is just at the point of historical concreteness that the Christian doctrine of Grace offers its greatest distinctiveness and contribution in spiritual power to

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[1]Romans 5:10; II Cor. 5:19; I Cor. 15:3; Heb. 10:12.

[2]I Cor. 15:17.

sinful man.[1] The cross and resurrection must never be interpreted in isolation from one another, but there is a sense in which the cross is the sacrificial accomplishment of redemption which is empowered and made vital to the individual through the resurrection of Christ and His living presence with the believer in the Christian community. This truth is not the magic or the mysticism which Oman abhored, but it makes possible the intensely personal appropriation of the spiritual blessings of God's grace which have been obtained through the death of Christ. It is regrettable that Oman did not develop more adequately the New Testament theme that "if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."[2]

Oman was true to his basic methodological principle of comprehensiveness when he set the concept of sin in its broadest possible context as enmity with reality. He rightly recognized that sin is not just a breaking of a law, even though that law be a moral law, but that sin includes an estrangement from all of life and only a right relation to the whole of one's environment can satisfy man's essential unity as a moral person. However, it must be asked if Oman has not blurred the personalistic focus of his interpretation of the Christian faith when he concluded somewhat impersonally

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[1]The RSV brings out this emphasis very pointedly in its translation of I Cor. 15:19f. "If in this life we who are in Christ have only hope, we are of all men most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead. . . ."

[2]Romans 5:10.

that "to be at enmity against God is neither more nor less than to be in bitter hostility to reality, with the sense that it is all against us," and that reconciliation is essentially "reconciliation to the discipline He appoints and the duty He demands."[1] Oman's interpretation is valid in stressing that enmity with God and reconciliation certainly encompass the total context of man's practical circumstances and situation in this life, and he may be followed confidently when he affirmed that reconciliation surely includes nothing less than the acceptance of these realities, but is this all? Is it sufficient to say that reconciliation includes nothing more? To put it very simply, Oman would have been closer to the center of his own personalistic thesis as well as closer to the seriousness of the Biblical picture of sin if he had portrayed sin as being more against God Himself than he did, more as a personal affront to God where one cries "against thee, thee only, have I sinned."[2] While it may be true as Oman said that enmity with God is frequently interpreted so abstractly that one may wonder how he could offend God, it may be that Oman's interpretation would leave one with the impression that if he has erred primarily against 'duty' and 'discipline' and 'appointment' there can be very little of serious consequence involved. Throughout Oman's theology his major emphasis fell upon sin as insincerity, spiritual lack of vision, the unwillingness to see, sin as "resisting the truth in unrighteousness," which is essentially what the gospels call "hypocrisy,"

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[1] Grace and Personality, pp. 116, 119.

[2] Psalm 51:4.

and which he interpreted primarily as dishonesty. "Thus it is not an act but a principle, which has as its natural outcome corrupt minds, degraded consciences and unnatural vices."[1] The depth of man's personal alienation from God, which the New Testament describes in terms of man being an enemy who is hostile in his mind toward God.[2] is never fully recognized; consequently, it seems that Oman has actually placed more weight of emphasis on his doctrine of personal reconciliation than his interpretation of sin can bear.

Unfortunately, Oman's Ritschlian affinities caused him to miss an essential depth of meaning in the doctrine of grace by avoiding the significance of the wrath of God.[3] The gulf that exists between man and God because of sin is not only a subjective aspect of human experience, but there is in man's sin and guilt an objective counterpart in the very nature

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[1]Honest Religion, p. 115. Cf. Natural and Supernatural, pp. 327-329; Vision and Authority, p. 65, p. 107; Grace and Personality, pp. 193, 197, 244, 266, 267.

[2]Romans 5:10; Col. 1:21; Rom. 11:28.

[3]Ritschl believed that the concept of the wrath of God was incompatible with the being of God as Father and love and concluded that "From the point of view of theology, therefore, no validity can be assigned to the idea of the wrath of God and His curse upon sinners as yet unreconciled. . ." Ritschl, op. cit., p. 323.

of God, whereby He must actually judge and reject man as long as he remains unreconciled to Him. The wrath of God need not be interpreted crudely or impersonally as though there were antipathies between God's holy love and His wrath, nor does it have to be expounded in crude and impersonal concepts as though God delighted in being antagonistic to man. Quite the contrary, it is because His holiness and love and concern for man are so distinctively personal that the wrath of God cannot be overlooked. If God's holiness or love were mere impersonal decree or force, it might be conceived how God could deal with sin lightly or even condone it indifferently, but when it is understood that God Himself in gracious personal love has offered Himself to man for fellowship, then and only then can the profound seriousness of man's rejection of that grace and the ensuing judgment of God be adequately understood. Oman may again be contrasted to the representatives of neo-orthodoxy for although Barth and Brunner do not agree on the ultimate eschatological manifestations of the wrath of God, they are both convinced that the wrath of God must be interpreted in integral correlation with the grace of God. Karl Barth emphasizes the necessity for a realistic interpretation of the wrath of God when he explains that if the opposition of God to man's rejection of Him is not taken seriously, then grace cannot really be grace.[1] Emil Brunner warns, in terms that might even have prophetic significance for Oman's interpretation of grace, that whenever the wrath of God is

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[1]Barth, Church Dogmatics, Volume IV, Section I, p. 490.

neglected there "is the beginning of the Pantheistic disintegration of the Christian Idea of God."[1]

Oman's insistence on the integral relation of the doctrine of God and salvation to the doctrine of the Church was in keeping with his principle of wholeness and also very near the New Testament emphasis on the theological nature of the Church. Whether or not Oman's fuller exposition corresponds to the basic New Testament description, his doctrine of the Church was at least begun on a solid Biblical methodological principle. One of the places he employed this principle very effectively was where he explained that frequently Churches, such as radical Catholicism and radical Evangelicalism, which are quite dissimilar in their externals, possess a remarkable correspondence in their true nature because of their mechanical interpretation of grace. Although Oman rather overstated his case in his characterization of Catholicism and Evangelicalism, his basic thesis remains valid, that the real essence of the doctrine of the Church is largely determined by the doctrine of salvation, and wherever grace tends to be an impersonal substance dispersed either by priest or evangelist, there can be no adequate understanding of the Church and its personal significance for God and man.

Oman's interpretation of the Church as a fellowship of persons united in the Divine order of love is an emphasis which is relevant for an understanding of the Church in any age. The natural man does tend to be "catholic" in

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[1] Brunner, Mediator, p. 445.

the sense of his continually being tempted to crystallize the fellowship of the Church into a mere institution. While this emphasis may not be a unique contribution of Oman's thought, for indeed many interpreters had said this before him, it is noteworthy that he emphasized that element of koinonia which plays such an important role in the New Testament Church.[1] It must be noted again, however, that Oman has put his stress on the form of freedom, which is the receiving of the Divine order of love voluntarily, and he has not too clearly defined the Biblical content of the basis for Christian koinonia. Oman was satisfied to speak in rather broad terms concerning the Church as a fellowship of believers associated with one another under the authority of the Spirit of God in the bond of love, in order that he might go on to emphasize the real burden of his message: that the Church is not an institution. Even though Oman's generalities are valid and even commendable in the interest of comprehensiveness, the New Testament is much more emphatic concerning the definite Christological framework of the koinonia. What one believes about who Christ is, what He has accomplished for men and their redemption, and what His relation to the Church is in the present, are questions which are inescapably related to the personal relationship of "believing in Him", and involve tremendous consequences concerning the nature of that fellowship of believers. Surely, Oman did not ignore these questions altogether but they did not receive

[1]Acts 2:42; I Cor. 1:9; Phil 2:1; I John 1:3.

adequate theological exposition in his interpretation. For example, Oman gave almost no emphasis whatsoever in his doctrine of the Church to the kerygmatic theme in the New Testament that it was the Christ of the resurrection in whom the Church believed and who actually created the fellowship of believers into His koinonia. It was the revolutionary fact that God raised up Christ that gave the Church both its assurance and confidence, and also its very existence at Pentecost, and made it possible for the Church to continue in the apostles' teaching and koinonia.[1] If it is not made expressly clear, as Oman unfortunately did not make it, that Jesus has actually risen from the dead, then the whole foundation of atonement crumbles and there is no justification for a community of hope.[2] The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost can only be understood in the light of the fact that the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension had already occurred, and the Holy Spirit came to illumine what had happened and to empower the Church in its witness of those events. The Church, therefore, has its origin, its message and its future hope orientated around the reality of those events. To fail to emphasize the significance of the actuality of these events, as Oman did, is to run the risk of involving one's interpretation of the Church in an unnecessary vagueness as though the Church were only a moral unification of men around the principle of a Divine order of love

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[1] Acts 2:24, 42.

[2] I Cor. 15:17, 19.

exemplified in Christ.

Oman's Ritschlian distrust of mysticism was probably one factor in his neglect of that genuine Biblical emphasis which describes the Christian's relationship with his risen Lord in terms that are, to be sure, historical, personal, and communal, but at the same time, unmistakably transcendental and mystical in nature. Oman did speak occasionally of the two or three who meet in the name of Christ, but it was usually mentioned in contrasting the fellowship of believers with an institutional interpretation of the Church. He spoke at length about following Christ's method in fulfilling His tasks, but he hardly acknowledged that the ministry of the Church is carried on by those believers who are strengthened and sustained by the risen Lord Himself. The work of the Church in Oman's emphasis is carried on by the personal freedom of those who discern God's mind and accept His will in their freedom, and this is a wholesome emphasis, but there is very little dynamic offered from the One who has promised His living and abiding presence in their midst.[1]

Bound up inseparably with Oman's neglect of the resurrection of Christ and His spiritual presence as the creating and renewing power of the Church is Oman's failure to realize the significance of the Church as the body of Christ. Perhaps his Ritschlian antimystical and antimetaphysical approach also caused him to overlook the significance of this theme, for

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[1] Matthew 28:20.

when Oman referred to the body of the Church he thought primarily in negative docetic concepts of the body as the institutional or organizational form of the Church which needed to die in order that the soul could live. He used an effective illustration to portray the living reality of the Church when he declared that its unity was not like the quarry which must remain undisturbed, but that it was like the building which was fashioned even in disturbance by a master plan. How much better he could have conveyed the dynamic nature of the Church if he had seen fit to interpret the Church as a living organism which is the body of Christ. There are several figures in the New Testament to describe the manysidedness of the Church's nature, and among them is the illustration of the Church as a building[1] which Oman has modified in his image concerning the quarry and the building; however, there can be little question that the expression of the Church as the body of Christ is central, and should surely not be overlooked.[2] Paul uses the phrase not only to vitalize the concept of the Church, but to historicize and concretize its relation to Jesus, and to identify its ministry with His presence and activity in the world. Although the Church is not a reincarnation of Christ in a literal sense, it is a reality vivified by the actual presence of Christ, which embodies the evangelical continuation of His incarnational ministry of reconciliation. Oman impoverished his

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[1] I Peter 2:4ff.

[2] I Cor. 12:12b; Ephesians 1:22f, 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24.

ecclesiology by neglecting the Christological and evangelical emphases which an acknowledgement of this theme could have introduced.

Oman has very thoroughly incorporated his interpretation of freedom and the secondary importance of institutions, which he inherited from Ritschl, into his theology. Oman is right when he charges that there has been a tendency, whether in Romanism or in Protestantism, to overlook the essence of the Church as a spiritual fellowship and to identify it with a particular institution. His emphasis on the subordination of the institution to the higher order of love and freedom is a valuable one, but Oman's basic thrust is often almost wholly negative concerning the institutional aspects of the Church. The burden of his message is that the Church may become an external organization which is a continual threat to the freedom of the individual, and he had difficulty in speaking of the Church as a fellowship of believers without appearing to disparage the visible manifestation of those believers in a historical institution. In other words, at times Oman seemed to present the reader with an either/or alternative—either the Church is a spiritual fellowship or it is an institution exercising external authority which commands submission and interprets grace mechanically. An illustration of this kind of contrast may be observed where he declared that when Christ began the Church He did not propose "the creation of an organization with rulers and subjects."[1] This is perfectly true, but

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[1]Oman, "The Presbyterian Churches," p. 76.

Oman's failure to interpret more positively how Christ's fellowship can be related to its organizational framework leaves the impression that organization per se is almost inescapably corrupt. In another place the only option which Oman allowed was the contrast between "an institution with official rule" or the security of "a fellowship with Divine gifts."[1] Few would deny the dangers which he stressed, but it must be asked whether or not Oman has given adequate attention to the contribution which the historical Church, even with all its institutional entanglements, has made in its collective theological experience and organizational structure to the preservation and guidance of the very internal authority and individual freedom which he believed to be at the heart of the Christian faith.

Even though Oman has done nothing really epoch making or unique in his interpretation of the concept of Church unity, he did so thoroughly saturate his doctrines of freedom, authority and the Church with the conviction of the essential spiritual nature of Christian unity that the cumulative force of his emphasis is quite effective. Some of our divisions within the Churches, as he pointed out, may truly be an indication not only of our self-centeredness and involvement in the historical order, but also an evidence of God's providential dealing with men in their freedom and conscience

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[1]Oman, "Church," p. 622.

in such a way that they shall not be able to identify the Kingdom of God with any particular institution. Oman has given very sound instruction when he explained that the way in which unity is sought is even more important than the unity which may be attained. The method of doctrinal obscurantism and ecclesiastical compromise can never produce a true Christian unity for this can come about only where there is present the kind of sincerity and seriousness which Oman prescribes concerning genuine theological differences, and organizational matters which involve important doctrinal principles. Oman possibly should have gone further than he did in outlining a more positive and practical program for implementing his concept of unity, but he has laid an excellent platform for at least the beginning principles of Christian unity.

Oman spoke occasionally of the task and privilege of bringing others into the Christian fellowship of the Church, and of the fact that Churches should be in competition only in proclaiming the Gospel; nevertheless, the Church's responsibility in evangelism was never really central in his theology. His quiet confidence in the triumph of the rule of God in the world is comforting and strengthening to a restless, anxious age, and his criticism of a competitive activism is needed, but Oman never adequately stressed the missionary and evangelistic zeal which so characterized the early Church and which is the evidence of a true Christian vitality in those who have known Christ. The New Testament teaching on the Church not only emphasizes the attitude of accepting the Divine order of love in freedom, but stresses

that there are some things the Christian Church must do to fulfill its commission. There are, as Oman recognized, different manifestations and expressions in the life of the Church whereby it accomplishes its ministry; however, the priority of proclaiming the gospel should have been made more central in Oman's theology. Throughout the New Testament the fact that there are events of gospel to be proclaimed, and the fact that believers have been commanded to give witness to that good news is the raison d'etre of the Church.[1] Oman's emphasis on the Church as the koinonia of individuals who have entered into the order of God's grace in a personal relationship is a valid description of the status of the Christian community, but this concept, if not balanced by an emphasis on the evangelistic task of the Church, is far too static to portray the dynamic mission of the Church. He was very reluctant to stress the fact that those who have received God's grace are commissioned as heralds and ambassadors in a "ministry of reconciliation"[2] to thrust upon man the decisive invitation of the message of reconciliation, and his theology contained very little of the realization of the critical importance of man's rejection of that message. It is unfortunate that Oman, who had laid the personalistic foundation so well for an evangelical theology, was never ever really able to feel the urgency of the apostolic appeal that "now is the day of salvation,"[3] and that so far as God's time

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[1] Mark 3:14; Matt. 10:5-7, 20:14; Mark 13:10; Matt. 28:19; John 17:18; Acts 1:8; I. Thess. 1:8; Rom. 10:14.

[2] II Cor. 5:18.

[3] II Cor. 6:2.

for salvation is concerned there is only now, and this means in a real sense that salvation is either now, or possibly never.

Throughout Oman's theology there is a failure to come to terms with the Christological aspects of Biblical eschatology. For example, even though Oman is to be commended for interpreting the significance of the doctrine of eternal life for the responsibilities and purposes of this present life, the Christian hope for life after death is unnecessarily weakened by his failure to base its assurance upon the fact of the resurrection of Christ. Oman's reasoning that men may be confident of immortality on the grounds that they are serving a purpose for which this life is too limited sounds more dependent on the rationalism of Kant than it does upon the witness of the New Testament writers who were convinced that Jesus Christ had "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."[1] Oman must not be condemned for attempting to integrate Kant's argument into the Christian belief in immortality, for there is truth in Kant's thesis that man cannot fulfill the demands of the moral law in this span of life, even if that law be conceived in rationalistic terms of moral maxims. The apostle Paul spoke concerning the insufficiency of even the law of God to enable men to keep His commandments because it was "weakened by the flesh,"[2] but he goes on to declare in a way that neither

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[1] II Tim. 1:10.

[2] Rom. 8:3.

Kant nor Oman ever fully admitted that the only way for one to have the power to overcome his moral impotency and his human evanescence is to base his confidence and hope in the faith that "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you."[1]

Oman's limitations in eschatology may also be seen in the way that he interpreted the Kingdom of God as though it were essentially a cosmological and ethical realm of God which one only needed to adjust to morally in order to know blessedness and peace. The ethical and moral structure of man's environment is surely important as the arena for man's practical moral struggle and responsibility; however, the basic thrust in the New Testament concerning the Kingdom of God is not that men, even though they be prophets, come to an "insight into the nature of reality,"[2] or that one must "discover" the true nature of God's rule.[3] It is rather that God has ushered into history a unique and sovereign kingdom by Jesus Christ.[4] Oman realized that the Kingdom of God is not a matter of man's

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[1] Rom. 8:11.

[2] Grace and Personality, p. 262.

[3] Ibid., p. 263, 269, 275.

[4] Mark 1:15; Mark 3:20-30 (Matt. 12:25-37, Luke 11:17 - 23); Matt. 13:16f; Luke 4:16-24; Luke 10:23f; Col. 1:13-14.

accomplishment, and he even acknowledged that the future hope of the kingdom lies in the Day of the Lord. He should not, then, have been content to allow the major emphasis of his interpretation to remain on the level of ethical axioms, insisting that the Kingdom of God was "a moral rule only to be introduced by moral means"[1] when there were so many transforming events of the kerygma to be proclaimed regarding the Kingdom of God. Oman did realize very adequately that the Kingdom of God is not just a remote and abstract speculation, but that it has practical relevance for our blessedness and freedom in the present situation. His encouragement for Christians to live in confidence as though the Kingdom of God had come for the world as it had for themselves does contain a true insight into realized eschatology;[2] however, Oman's theology would have had a better eschatological balance if he had also emphasized that futuristic dimension of the Kingdom of God which shall one day be manifested in glory and consummated in finality at the return of Christ.[3]

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[1] Grace and Personality, p. 272.

[2] Mark 1:15, 9:1; Matt. 3:2; Matt. 10:7, 12:28; Luke 11:20; Luke 17:20f.

[3] Phil. 3:20-21; Titus 2:13; I John 3:2; Col. 3:4; I Thess. 4:17.

From the foregoing discussions of exposition and evaluation, the major thesis may be drawn in conclusion: Oman's basic contribution to theology does not lie in the "content" or "exposition" area of thought but rather in the field of theological methodology where freedom, personality, sincerity, and comprehensiveness are indispensible attitudes and concepts for the proper approach to theology. It should now be possible to go on beyond Oman and make a more conscious attempt to interpret a theology which is more thoroughly orientated around the kerygmatic event and content of Biblical revelation. It will be helpful, however, to allow Oman to stand guard over these efforts and insist that one maintain nothing in his theology that he cannot confirm in the whole breadth and depth of his experience.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

THE ROBERTSON SMITH CONTROVERSY

The Robertson Smith controversy within the Free Church of Scotland arose in 1877 and ended in 1881, being dealt with in the Free Church's Annual Assemblies each year within that period. The case arose over articles contributed to the Encyclopaedia Brittanica's ninth edition by William Robertson Smith, a twenty-four year old professor of Hebrew in the Church's theological college in Aberdeen. The articles, particularly one entitled "Bible" advanced the views of higher criticism, and dealt freely with the dates, authorship and contents of various books of Scripture. To deal in this way with the Bible was unheard of within an orthodox and evangelical Church of that day. A full-blown heresy case soon developed and was dealt with under the elaborate forms of a Presbyterian judicial process.

The General Assembly of 1877 set in motion, at Smith's own demand, a "libel", making detailed charges of erroneous teaching. The Assembly of 1878 declared the libel to be relevant, which meant that Smith's views were found to be contradictory to the standards of the Church. The Assembly of 1879 ordered immediate steps to be taken for carrying out this finding and apparently the Church was heading straight for a condemnation of Smith. At this stage, Principal Rainy of New College, Edinburgh, who was Chairman of the Church's College

Committee, changed his position. He had hitherto favored Smith, at least to the extent of opposing the prosecution by libel. To avert the impending condemnation of Smith he made a compromise with the anti-Smith forces. Under the agreement, they were to drop the libel and Rainy would join them in removing Smith from his professorial position. This action by Principal Rainy aroused intense adverse feeling. The controversy rose to fever-heat at the Assembly of 1880. After prolonged and keen debate, Smith was acquitted by a majority of seven. Apparently the case was ended.

Within a few days, however, the fire was again ablaze. A new volume of the Encyclopedia Brittanica appeared containing fresh articles by Smith even more advanced in their critical position than the earlier ones. The controversy reopened and by a very large majority the Assembly of 1881 declared that Smith's tenure as professor in the Theological College was ended.[1]

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[1]Detailed information on the Robertson Smith Case is to be found in the following works:

Robertson Smith Case, a bound volume of all the official papers concerning the case, located in the library of Westminster College, Cambridge.

J. S. Black and G.W. Chrystal, The Life of William Robertson Smith (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912).

P. Carnegie Simpson, "The Robertson Smith Case Fifty Years After," British Weekly (Vol. XC, May 28, 1931), pp. 161-62.
(continued on page 272)

(Footnote 1 continued from page 271)

G. F. Barbour, The Life of Alexander Whyte, "The Robertson Smith Case," (London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 1923), pp. 201-227.

P. Carnegie Simpson, The Life of Principal Rainy (2 volumes) (London: 1909).

John Macpherson, A History of the Church of Scotland (London: Alexander Gardner, 1901).

APPENDIX B

JOHN OMAN ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

In The Book of Revelation, published in 1923, Oman treated the book of Revelation in three parts: the text and its rearrangement; the text and translation; and commentary. Concerning the book, Oman said a fitting dedication would be: "To the onlie begetter of the insuing book, Prof. Burkitt's Seminar." He explained:

> My presence at its deliberations on "Revelation" was not due to any particular interest in the subject, but to a vague idea that, to think about religion, without knowing a little about its documents, is not much more use than to be a pundit on its documents, without doing a little thinking about religion.[1]

Oman confessed that the study only stirred his antagonism to being baffled by a problem. As he continued his study, three positive convictions emerged concerning Revelation. The first was that the style and thought alike guarantee unity of authorship. Secondly, he noted that the literary sources were almost entirely the prophets, especially Daniel. The third conclusion was that the visions were "transparencies of what are for us abstractions, but were for the ancient world concrete, if ideal realities, and not accounts of material supernatural happenings."[2] He felt, then, that there was through the whole of the book a view of the world which

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[1] John Oman, The Book of Revelation (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), p. vii.

[2] Ibid., p. vii.

might be reconstructed. Some parts Oman felt to be greatly clear, others greatly confused; for this there must be some reason other than the incapacity of the author. The most probable cause, he concluded, was disarrangement of the text. Some evidence of textual disarrangement was apparent. Although pain and sorrow are described (xxi.4) as having passed away forever, it is found in a subsequent passage (xxii.2) that nations need healing. The Holy City is represented as coming (xxi.9), but in an earlier passage (xx.4) the saints are described as sitting on thrones. The prophetic call is not found immediately after the message to the Churches, as it ought to be, but considerably later, in chapter ten. When he began to transpose the sections in the order which commended itself from an independent view of the contents of the book, he made the extraordinary discovery that the sections, as he was induced to reshape them, were of uniform length. He made the transpositions with the help of Gebhardt's edition of the Greek New Testament, and found that the usual length of the sections as reconstructed was thirty-three lines in Gebhardt's text. This criterion of length was of service in enabling him to determine a certain number of smaller glosses, which included practically all the doublets, but it also served to indicate a variety of glosses which had a "curious family likeness of dull comment."[1]

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[1]H. A. A. Kennedy, Review of The Book of Revelation, The Expositor (Ninth Series, Vol. I, 1924), pp. 232f.

In December, 1925, Dr. Oman wrote an article in The Expositor on the "Apocalypse" in which he made one major change in his theory of The Book of Revelation. He said that in his original theory he had been dominated by the ordinary idea of a gloss, as an interjected explanatory clause. But further study of the book had shown him that the author gave many such explanations which were undoubtedly genuine.[1] He concluded that many of the glosses were genuine and were repetitious. He also noted that the removal of all doublets which are not guaranteed clearly by the text enabled him to divide the sections he prepared in the earlier theory more naturally into the proper equal lengths. He explained:

> It may well be asked, why, especially as so large a part of what I had excluded were doublets, I did not discover this test at the time. But I suppose that I am not the first person who, when working with a mass of detail, could not see the wood for the trees. In some subconscious way I must have noticed it, because, as soon as I dismissed the subject from my conscious mind, and turned to other studies, it occurred to me.[2]

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[1] John Oman, "The Apocalypse," The Expositor (Ninth Series Vol. IV, 1925), p. 443.

[2] Book of Revelation, p. 442.

These conclusions Oman used to form the basis for his The Text of Revelation, A Revised Theory, published in 1928.

The essentials of the early theory are not changed in The Text of Revelation; on the contrary, Oman felt the early theory to be confirmed in the later work. The Text of Revelation is primarily a revision of the attempt to rearrange the text in the light of the new clue he had found. Oman was more convinced than before that the Apocalypse consisted of a number of sections almost exactly equal in length. By removing all doublets—"repetitions by the original editor from his author,"—the almost exactly equal length of the sections was demonstrable.[1]

According to his theory, Oman arrived at a book of twenty-seven sections of exactly equal length. His final arrangement was as follows:

I	"The Prophetic Call"	Ch. i.9 - ii.3
II	"Ephesis, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira"	Ch. ii.3 - 19
III	"Thyatira, Sardis"	Ch. ii.19 - iii.7
IV	"Philadelphia, Laodicea"	Ch. iii.8 - 22
V	"Second Prophetic Call"	Ch. xxii.10-12, x.1-11
VI	"Summary to the Story of Prophecy"	Ch. xi. 1-13
VIII	"Fall of Satanic Powers"	Ch. xii.1-14
IX	"Origin of the World-Kingdoms"	Ch. xii.14 - xiii.11
X	"The False Prophet and the True"	Ch.xii.11-18, xiv.6-12
XI	"The First Six Monarchies"	Ch. xv.5-6, xvi.2-16 and viii.6-11
XII	untitled	Ch. xix.11-15, xiv.19-20, xix.16-21
XIII	"The End of the World-Rule"	Ch. xvi.17 - xvii.9
XIV	"Disruption and Anarchy"	Ch.xvii.9 - xviii.6
XV	"Desolation and Mourning"	Ch. xviii.19 - xix.9
XVI	"The Old Order and the New"	Ch. xvii.19 - xix.9

[1] John Oman, The Text of Revelation: A Revised Theory (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1928), p. 3.

XVII	"The New Prophetic Source"	Ch. i.7, iv.1 - v.2
XVIII	"The Roll and the Lamb"	Ch. v.2 - vi.1
XIX	"Summary of the Woes"	Ch. vi.2 - 17
XX	"The Sealing of the Saints"	Ch. vii.1-17
XXI	"The First Woe"	Ch. viii.1-5, xvi.4-7, viii.6-13, ix.1-7.
XXII	"The Second Woe"	Ch. ix.7-21
XXIII	"The Third Woe"	Ch. xi. 14-19, xiv.1-5, 13-14
XXIV	"Ingathering of Good and Destruction of Evil"	Ch. xiv.14-19, xv.1, xv.6 - xvi.1, xv.2-4
XXV	"The Holy Jerusalem"	Ch. xxi.9-24
XXVI	"The Holy Jerusalem	Ch. xxi.24 - xxii.5, 6, 8, 9, xvi.15, xxii.14-17,20.
XXVII	untitled	Ch. i. 3-6, xx.1-10.
XXVIII	"The Final State"	Ch. xx.11 - xxi.1, 3-8, xxii.18, 19, 21.

(It will be noted that VII is omitted because Oman felt an omission had occurred in the text of Revelation.)

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Vol.	Date	Page	Vol.	Date	Page
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42	April 11, 1907	17	42	May 2, 1907	98
42	May 16, 1907	141	42	June 27, 1907	297
42	July 11, 1907	349	42	Oct. 3, 1907	617
43	Oct. 10, 1907	17	43	Oct. 17, 1907	41
43	Nov. 14, 1907	153	43	Dec. 19, 1907	329
44	May 21, 1908	169	45	April 1, 1909	713
49	Oct. 20, 1910	82	49	Feb. 9, 1911	558
50	Sept. 28, 1911	621	50	July 20, 1911	410
53	Dec. 5, 1912	306	54	May15, 1913	178
55	Dec. 18, 1913	392	55	March 5, 1914	674
55	March 12, 1914	704	56	Jun3 11, 1914	298
56	Dec.17, 1914	248	57	April 23, 1914	97
57	April 30, 1914	127	59	Dec. 2, 1915	186
62	July 12, 1917	255	63	Oct. 11, 1917	27
63	Oct. 25, 1917	63	63	Nov. 22, 1917	146
70	May 12, 1921	108	70	Sept. 29, 1921	472
71	Oct. 6, 1921	18	71	Oct. 13, 1921	42
71	Nov. 10, 1921	125	71	Dec. 8, 1921	250
71	Dec. 15, 1921	274	71	Feb. 2, 1922	408
72	May 11, 1922	118	73	Dec. 14, 1922	274
74	April 5, 1923	12	86	July 11, 1929	309
89	Nov. 6, 1930	113	90	June 11, 1931	214
90	July 16, 1931	305	90	July 23, 1931	344
91	Oct. 22, 1931	74	91	Nov. 26, 1931	174
92	August 25, 1932	408	93	Feb. 19, 1933	386
94	May 18, 1933	136	97	Oct. 18, 1934	54
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